PEACE IN OUR TIME

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BY

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AUTHOR OF
"THE COMPLEAT BACHELOR," "LITTLE DEVIL DOUBT,"
"WIDDERSHINS," ETC.

"We still appear to be the same; but—who can tell?—something may have gone, and something new and strange and still invisible may have come to take its place."

Morning Post.

"Give Peace in Our Time, O Lord."

Prayer Book.

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DEDICATED

TO

THE LADS OF THE VILLAGE

PREFACE

I SHOULD like to say exactly how this book came to be written.

Originally it was to have been of the conflict between the man who saw active service and the man who did not. Apart from the wearing of khaki, and with the exception of a very brief experience in France, I myself saw no active service. Perhaps it was for that reason, and out of that experience, that my heart went out to the man who did my fighting for me.

I wanted to make my book for him.

But I soon saw that this idea was out of date, false and useless. Very soon the problem had become, not a question of who fought and who did not—for all were under orders of one sort or another—but what, actually, was the upshot of it all to-day.

What, in my observation, the results are, appears in the following pages.

I have had no desire but to help. Never have I wished to embarrass the man who has the job in hand. My own years of socialistic thought have been over for more than a quarter of a century, and, if one dared to call oneself anything at all nowadays,

I suppose I should call myself a Tory. But it has seemed to me that before the problem of post-war conditions for the ex-service man can be tackled it must first be clearly seen, with all it implies. I am aware that we have had to carry on more or less from hand to mouth and from day to day, with expedients and palliatives, and that these have been necessary. But nobody pretends that these expedients offer a final solution, and it may now even be a question whether they do not delay that solution. I have no more got a solution up my sleeve than anybody else. But I can make public, for whatever it may be worth, the experience of my own eyes and ears.

Kenneth Chacey is my type of the young demobilized officer out of a job—the young man out of whose life, when he should have been learning his job, the war cut five crucial years. What is he to do with the rest of that life? There are many astounding things about him that I have not set down in this book. Whether I know as much about his immediate senior, Rex, is another matter, though I am of Rex's years, and have earnestly studied his position among many of my acquaintance. As for Kenneth's immediate junior, Maurice Chacey—the lad of to-morrow—I shall have Maurices of my own before I have time to turn round, or can afford to buy them Roadeaters.

So my story falls of itself into the form of a parable, with these three—Rex of yesterday, Kenneth of to-day, and Maurice of to-morrow—as protagonists, with the Boys' Room standing for whatever we like to call it.

I have started from first principles, including the chief fact of our time, and have worked the thing out in solitude as an occupation and an interest. The conclusions at which I have arrived are my own. There is not a passage that has not been checked with actual observation of incidents and events. But I do not for a moment imagine that others have not been working in the same field concurrently with myself. These things are in the air, and we may expect to hear more about them. Kenneth, one or other of him, has written his experiences of the war, often artless, but indelibly vivid, infinitely moving, and with an authenticity that no other person could assume for him. May we not hope to hear, from his own mouth, his experiences of peace also?

O. O.

HENLEY-ON-THAMES,
31*st August*, 1923.

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PEACE IN OUR TIME

PART I

I

"THE BOYS' ROOM"

Move the furniture, push back the skins and rugs to the walls, and few better rooms for dancing would have been found. Because of its site (it occupied the space that had once been the house's back yard) it was unusually large. There was nothing below it, for the room itself lay like an area, sunk some feet beneath the level of the remnant of garden that could be seen through the large glass doors and windows at the farther end. Since it communicated with the rest of the house only by means of the low oaken gallery that ran along the whole of the right-hand side of it, the sounds of music would hardly reach those who might wish to be quiet. And its floor was of shining parquet. Made for dancing—made for it——

Yet one was conscious immediately on entering of something—let us say anachronistic—about the place. The reason might dawn on one in five minutes or half an hour. It was a "copied" room. It was a replica, set up in a quiet Square within a biscuit's-

toss of the Cromwell Road, of the gun-room of a country house. Here in London, with the London plane-trees outside and the backs of the neighbouring houses looking down on it, it represented a piece of the diminished fortunes of the Wyecastles of Temple Hazard.

A certain family piety had gone to its setting-up. Generations of Herefordshire Wyecastles had passed through the room of which this was more or less accurately a duplicate, and already, at the time of the change, Mrs. Wyecastle had passed sixty. Sixty is an ill age for the uprooting of an old lady from the place where she had spent her entire life. Of her offspring, only her son Rex and certain grandchildren, her dead daughter's boys, had at that time remained. All the more reason why the histories and associations of the old place should be preserved to her for the remnant of her days. Preserved they had accordingly been, as far as this room could enshrine them. It was this preservation that gave the room its equivocal look, old and settled at a first glance, less permanent and somehow a little disturbing when one looked again.

For when all had been done the result remained still in doubt. The worn old leather furniture, the heads and skins and casts of fish—the rods and guns and silver pots and family photographs—these were set out on the polished floor or fixed to the panelled walls or ceiling-beams as they had immemorially been; but alas!—that panelling, that should have been of riven oak, was probably hardly a quarter of an inch thick. The beams overhead were mere cased-in girders, and the massive-looking carved mantelpiece with the old punt-gun and fowling-pieces over it did not give out quite the right sound when it was struck. Understand, however, that all was

serviceable enough. The Boys' Room, as it was always called, had outer walls of brick and roofing of asbestos. It had damp-courses and ventilation, and steps had been taken that its chimney should not smoke. But it was no more than a shadow of the old Herefordshire home.

Yet it served; and on a certain June morning of last year, at half-past eleven o'clock, with the light gleaming on the cleared floor and making a mirror of the piano-top, one willingly lent oneself to the illusion. The view through the window at any rate was undeniably real—the plane-trees, the chimneys and pipe systems of the sunny backs opposite, the four steps up into the strip of garden, the side gate, the cat on the wall. And most reassuringly real was the sound that came, not from the piano, but from the tall gramophone that stood within its curve. For the instrument was playing a fox-trot, and Rex Wyecastle was taking a dancing lesson.

It seemed rather a new trick for a dog of his age to be learning. He was forty-nine, and in some respects looked it. In others perhaps he did not. Let us split the difference and say that he had arrived at the time of life when he had to make the most of his hair. The temples were no trouble. By close cutting, what might have been a little silvery betrayal was all but defeated. But artful brushing had been necessary, and inter-brushings, and a final brushing to top off with, together with whatever it was out of a bottle or a pot he used, in order that the resultant fine brown plaiting should not show its interstices. There was just a trace of a patch at the point about which the whole carefully managed system centred. And he shaved with no less care.

His figure, on the other hand, was all to the good. He was straight and more than ordinarily tall, not

an ounce above weight, and wore his black "city" jacket and striped cashmere trousers with the air of a man who might stand much on hearthrugs with his back to fireplaces—not idly, but responsibly, receiving the cards of callers, touching bells, requesting that a particular file or dossier should be brought to him, signifying that the caller might be shown in, and then graciously waving him to the visitors' chair. As a matter of fact he did all of these things daily in the course of his official duties at the Office of Organization, S.W.1.

In his dancing both of these aspects of him showed. There was no need for the little Frenchwoman who had him in hand to tell him to hold his body straight; he had the control and balance of his muscles. But ah, the indiscipline of the feet in the spat-topped buttoned boots! Half a dozen times she had winced, and as many times he had bent his tall figure in distress over her.

"Oh—how dreadfully clumsy I am!"

"Eet ees nothing—I learn to keep my toes in my pocket—chassez—not too queek—one, two, three, four—hold me fairrmer—you must make me feel what eet ees you would do——"

Then once more the stumble and the heartfelt "I beg your pardon!"

She was—not to waste any words about it—a minx. The gleaming black calves were those of a minx, minx-like was the popping in and out now of this white rounded shoulder and now of that from her single-piece black satin blouse. Her imitation osprey feather brushed his cheek from time to time. But her wiles were lost on him. Bidden to hold her more closely he merely did so. Told to keep time he kept time laboriously, counting softly under his breath.

"No, no—stop and watch me——"

He watched her attentively. Diffidently his own spatted boots copied the evolutions of the minx-like ankles. The music ran down, and she skipped away with swinging skirts to lift the needle. Then, repossessing herself of his arm, she led him to the large leather sofa.

She had been in the room twice before—this was Rex Wyecastle's third dancing lesson—but once more, as she sat with her hands in her lap and her little feet asking as it were for his attention, her eyes took in the mounted heads, the school and regimental groups, the rods and pots, the locked rack of twelve-bores under the gallery. Perhaps she sought something intimate, personal to himself; anyway she found it—an enlarged photograph of him in the uniform of a Lieutenant, General List, that hung in a spinily carved Indian or Cingalese frame low down by the side of the chimney breast. Once more she bounced herself up and tripped to this enlargement.

" You ? " she said, her head on one side.

He looked up as if he had forgotten her presence. " Eh ? Oh ! Yes." And he added, rousing himself, " Yes. Some years ago, of course. And nothing very glorious, I'm afraid——"

" Eet ees ver' nice ! " she approved. " But so *féroce!* Almost you eat a little girl like me ! "

He lifted his hand and spoke with a certain authority. " Tell me, Mademoiselle, why your pupils want to learn to dance. I mean pupils of my age."

" I have pupils older than you."

" Quite so. Why do they want to learn to dance ? "

She bounced down at his side again. " They have different reasons, *naturellement*——"

" Such as——? "

" One pupil, he learn to dance to give surprise to his daughter. One day she will say to him, ' What a pity you do not dance,' and he will say to her, ' Who says I do not dance? Come and dance with me——' "

" His daughter, eh? "

Again the roguish look. " You must not say naughty things. . . . Another pupil, he is jealous of his wife. Perhaps he think to give her surprise too, to make her a little jealous also, ye-es? "

" Your pupils seem to tell you a good deal about themselves."

She laughed trillingly. " Oh, always, everything! Only sometimes they do not know when they do it! "

" How's that? "

" Ecoutez." The pointed-nailed hands made little balancing movements. " You come to me. You say like thees: ' Oh, dancing keeps you fit—one is bored at the Club '—you all begin like that. But soon you say "—here Mademoiselle gave a toss of her head such as no Englishwoman ever yet gave—" ' I have a friend who also is learning to dance—he is jealous of his wife or he wishes to give surprise to his daughter ' —you speak of yourself as if somebody else—oh, I have expérience of you naughty boys! "

" And why do I want to learn to dance? "

" You make jealous your wife? "

" I am not married."

" Then they are not your boys, these boys of thees Boys' Room? "

" No."

" I think you are one of the boys yourself! "

Rex rose. " What about the waltz? "

She also rose, and the lesson was resumed.

The young man who suddenly appeared at the end

of the gallery fell back for a moment, half-opened his mouth to speak, and then, removing his bowler hat from the back of his head, leaned over the rail to watch. His age was twenty-six. He was dressed in a grey lounge suit with a yolk-of-egg waistcoat and a soft collar pinned with a gold pin, and carried a cane, chamois gloves, and a couple of sporting papers. He had probably not been much in the country lately, and in particular had that not uncommon air that is less an air of leisure than of not having anything at all to do. His good-looking head rose a little steeply at the back, and his light brown hair was sleekly wet-brushed. Such shadow of a moustache as he had was close-trimmed to his smiling mouth; but this mouth seemed to smile too habitually, and his eyes were too alert for composure. For various reasons it might have been interesting to peep into his pockets. The side ones, for example, sat so flat to his hips that they could have contained nothing bulkier than a letter or so, and from this one might risk the guess that he gave a good deal of nightly care to a suit that could hardly have borne a more recent date than 1911. From his outer breast-pocket something did peep forth—the corner of a neatly folded purple silk handkerchief. But it was from a pocket in the yolk-of-egg waistcoat that he drew forth a pasteboard packet as yellow as the waistcoat itself, and from the other waistcoat pocket that he took a box of Barnardo matches. He did not at once light the cigarette. He held it loosely between two embrowned fingers, with the packet of paper matches in the other hand and the bowler hat swinging lightly and nervously beneath.

And above all one had the impression of him that he, Kenneth Chacey, Rex Wyecastle's sister's son, was adrift, fitted in nowhere, did not much care

whether he fitted in or not, and might readily become a nuisance to those whose days were more fully occupied than his own.

There is no reason that one knows of why a gentleman, not even yet definitely elderly, should be disconcerted at being discovered in the act of taking a dancing lesson. It is known that he does not dance; presently he will be seen to be dancing; and so tuition of some sort in the interval may be assumed. But Rex, seeing his nephew, all at once stopped dead. Slowly he let go his hold of his partner. With mortification he looked at the uninvited young man, with mortification away again. The gramophone continued to grind out the waltz.

As for Kenneth Chacey—his uncle dancing, by Jove! Coming out a bit of a lad in his green old age! It was Kenneth who, catching the dancing mistress's eyes, first stirred to life.

"More music, b'Gosh! Town's full of it! Carry on, I only looked in. What, stopping? In that case——"

And without further ado than to "hope he wasn't butting in," Kenneth flung his leg over the rail, dropped lightly down, threw the cigarette and matches into his hat and his hat on the gun-rack, and advanced with outstretched hands to Mademoiselle.

There is always something, not precisely to be called hostility, but chill and unwelcomed, inherent in the mere difference of a score and more of years. We would shrink from the whole question. But it is inescapable. That exquisite dancing of the young, those attuned feet in whose lightness the very world renews itself, mock him who must spend ten minutes with his hair-brushes and unguents before his looking-glass. Rex could only watch, then turn his back on them, and with his foot begin to move the mats

and skins into their places again. For he saw that they danced exquisitely. They danced, not to the strains of a tinny gramophone, but to the pulsing of their own young blood. Only once did the young man of twenty-six speak, and that was to say, as their steps became one, " Ah! Where do you go? Piccadilly? Embassy? Rectors? Hyde Park? "

And when at last the waltz ended, and out in the street, through the silence that seemed somehow slightly strained, the thin sound of somebody playing a cornet was heard, they could only look at one another, hand still in hand, draw breath, and smile.

But from the getting up of the sun to the going down of the same, the burden of instant brightness was on young Kenneth Chacey. With his hands on the Frenchwoman's shoulders he looked her straight in the eyes.

" You're the very—but I'll tell you presently. Look here, Rex, aren't you going to introduce me? "

" My nephew," said Rex, with his back to them.

" Bit short measure for an introduction, but it'll do," quoth Kenneth. " Now you come here on the Sophia. Where are my cigarettes? "

He bore her off to the sofa, where he plumped her down like a baked apple among the cushions.

Rex was still moving the rugs this way and that with his foot. For a reason of which his nephew yet knew nothing, that beautiful, hateful dancing had pierced him in a way he refused to acknowledge. He denied that he was pierced; what, confess to a wound because the young could do things he could not do? It was disproportionate, unhumorous; to be over thirty on such terms would be unendurable. But he told himself these things in vain. It was not their dancing only; the irremediable gap of a generation showed through everything they did. He knew

his nephew Kenneth. Kenneth was at his free-and-easy antics again at that very moment. From the sofa he heard a familiar laugh, then the word "Gasper?" and the spurt of a match. Other words too he heard. "Now don't duck at it like that! When will you girls learn how to take a light properly? Let it burn down—chin up—feather out of the way—there! Do you know this one about a Gold Flake packet?"

His nephew had taken the inferior little creature's measure with contemptuous ease. Rex certainly did not envy him that mastery.

But something remained—something remained——

Apparently it was "the one about the Gold Flake packet" that was engrossing them. Further words floated to Rex where he stood with his back to them, not even moving the rugs now.

"No, there's no catch about it. Look here. Just these two lines. 'Every Genuine Packet.' Begin there, and tell me how many H's there are."

"Now you make a big mark on my arm——"

"You know what a letter H is—Ash—Hash—and don't keep shoving your shoulders at me like that."

A little laugh. "I please myself about my own shoulders——"

"Don't answer me back, wumming——"

And what though Rex found it stupid, of the pavement, beneath disdain? Something remained. What though Kenneth himself might not remember her the next time he saw her? Something remained. Youth itself, mere youth, seemed more to be prized than virtue or thought or duty or endeavour. It had recognitions, understandings, the leaping look in the eyes, from which Rex was shut out.

And Rex Wyecastle was going to marry a young girl.

Suddenly he allowed the lid of the gramophone to fall with a slap that caused the two heads on the sofa to start apart. He advanced. The words that he spoke were as plain a dismissal as if he had touched the bell on his table at the Office of Organization.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle. I think that will do for this morning."

The dancer rose obediently. "And to-morrow, M'sieur?"

"I don't think so. Probably not. I'll ring you up."

"But I say, Rex, old thing——" This came protestingly from Kenneth, in whose hand Rex saw a card.

"I'll see you through the garden. It's shorter," said Rex.

The dancing mistress's parting smile was covertly for Kenneth, and as, accompanied by Rex, she passed through the glass doors, he heard her diminishing voice:

"You must practeese—you must not slip back—you begin all over again each lesson if you do——"

II

KENNETH

Hardly had Rex turned his back when Kenneth tiptoed to a bell. It was not heard to ring, but Edwards stood there. What it was that Kenneth wanted Edwards could not have guessed, but that he wanted something was as certain as that the sun

was shining on the South Kensington backs. The young man's restless hazel eye was warily on the window by which his uncle would return.

"Edwards—on the Q.T.——"

"Sir?"

"Got any green tea in the house?"

"I think a little might be found, Mr. Kenneth."

"About a couple of ounces, and——"

It was not for the first time. Edwards perfectly understood. "And the bay-leaves and the calf's-foot jelly?"

"As ever was. Say for half a dozen. One of 'em's a friend of yours, by the way."

"Who's that, sir?"

"Major Blythe."

"And how's the Major, sir?"

"Top-hole-ski. Slip 'em into the car and put 'em down to my account. And Edwards!"

"Sir?"

"Perhaps they'd better be referred to as the Mellins and the Glaxo. How's Mrs. Edwards!"

"Nicely, sir, thank you, sir."

"Right. I shan't be leaving for a quarter of an hour yet. Put 'em in the car."

With another nimble glance towards the garden as Edwards retired, the young man proceeded still further to lengthen his "account." He stole to a cabinet in the wall and took from it a handful of cigars and a couple of packs of playing cards, to which last he gave a dexterous, absent-minded little flip. He did not put them into the pockets that so trimly set off his neat hips. Using the sporting papers as a wrapper, he made a packet of them, placing his hat on the top to keep it in position. He was nowhere near either the cabinet or the gun-rack when Rex returned from the garden.

"Who's the bird, Rex?" he asked.

"The——?"

"The little lady with the osprey as now worn."

Rex spoke austerely. "She comes—well, you saw for yourself what she comes for."

"Good show!" said Kenneth heartily. "You'll be all right with a bit of practice. In fact, to come to the point——"

But he stopped suddenly. Certainly there was little in his uncle's manner to encourage him to go on. Rex knew these "points" that his nephew was in the habit of so affably approaching. He spoke with marked abruptness.

"May I ask why you aren't at your insurance office this morning?"

This was painful to Kenneth. It struck him as showing a strange lack of knowledge of life on his uncle's part. The insurance office had been an episode of more than two months ago, and surely Rex ought to have known that jobs don't last for ever. But perhaps that came of Rex's being in the Organization Office, where for all Kenneth knew they did. As a matter of fact he had been several things since the incident of the insurance office. These included a Cellular Underwear and a brand of Algerian Moselle—"Wholesale, of course—no vulgar retail commerce—ha!" He was about to give his uncle these details of his more recent history when, taking out his packet of cigarettes in order to light a new one from the burning end of the last, his attention was diverted.

"I say," he exclaimed, "that's a really good one about the H's. Seen it? It's right under your nose, no catch at all. You begin here, these two lines: 'Every Genuine Packet of Gold Flake Cigarettes,' and you count the H's——"

"I'm looking at the state of your fingers."

"Evens you don't—a bob——"

Rex drew himself up. "Kenneth, sometimes you distress me beyond measure."

"Sorry, old boy. But if you're wondering why I came this morning, the fact is I have an idea——"

Another idea! How well Rex knew them! Probably horses this time. Lotteries or Prize Competitions ran the horses close. One of Kenneth's inspirations had been that if Rex could see his way to stumping up a couple of hundred for the purpose of financing a small starting-price bookmaker's business, the clients for which Kenneth was already in touch with, Kenneth would see that he got his money back twice over before the end of the flat-racing season. Another had been—but Rex found it too painful. He drew up his chin between the wings of his collar.

"It seems to me you go from bad to worse. You've been given chance after chance. Opening after opening's been provided for you. I won't say they've all been brilliant, but they were a beginning, and a change from this perpetual loafing."

Kenneth spoke soothingly.

"Exactly. I know. That's just what I mean. You don't suppose *I* don't get fed up with loafing? Now if you'll just let me outline my scheme——"

"I simply cannot understand it. Here is the country, passing through a momentous crisis in its history——"

"Come, it always is, you know, old chap——"

"——in the middle of a most difficult and dangerous time—I use those words advisedly—and at the moment when it behoves every one of us to be putting his shoulder to the wheel you find nothing better to

occupy yourself than—than—than inanities of *that* kind!" He glared with disgust at the virulent yellow packet.

"But you won't even listen——"

"You're soft—you're unexercised—your fingers are a disgrace—you draw that filthy stuff into your lungs—and once or twice I've thought your hand's been not too steady——"

Until the storm should have blown over Kenneth had turned to the window. A maid was shaking a mat out of a staircase window opposite, and somewhere across the square a barrel-organ was playing. His patient fingers drummed softly to the tune. But all was not lost yet. Give his uncle his head and there might still be something doing. He waited for the first signs of relenting in Rex's voice.

"Have you *no* object in life, Kenneth?" The words came less scoldingly, and Kenneth wheeled cheerfully round.

"Rather! That's just what I have! It's like this——"

"Look at your cousin Maurice. He's six years younger than you, but he's ten times your sense of responsibility. Where is he at this hour of the morning? Where he should be, at his School of Mines, preparing himself for a useful career——"

It would have been indiscreet to remind Rex that, if Kenneth was not at his insurance office, neither was he himself at his Office of Organization. In a quieter voice the older man went on:

"I'm honestly and sincerely troubled about you. Your grandmother's in the greatest distress about you. You were warned that you were frittering away your gratuity money. Since then you've had advance after advance. Nobody forgets that you behaved with great gallantry during the war.

You're a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order—my mere O.B.E.'s nothing to that. You attained Field Rank at a creditably early age. We acknowledge all that. But "—here, approaching him, Rex put his hand on his nephew's shoulder—" isn't it time you began to take things more seriously? I admit you're cheerful to an astonishing degree. You have natural high spirits—they're probably physiological, part of your constitution. But even gaiety can be overdone. What's to happen in a few years' time? Think—you might want to settle down. Some day you might want—well, to marry, for example——"

Kenneth gave him an amused stare. "To *what?*"

With lessening asperity as he drew nearer to his own affairs, Rex continued:

"As a matter of fact I've a reason for saying all this to you. A private and personal reason. I didn't intend to say anything about it for the present, but perhaps I may tell you. In confidence. I'm going to be married myself."

If a pistol had gone off in the room Kenneth's start could hardly have been more sudden. But, whatever had passed instantaneously behind those quick opportunist eyes, only a single word leaped from his lips.

"*When?*"

He hardly felt his uncle's hand on his shoulder. Already he was seas deep in new prospects, calculations, revisions, readjustments. Vaguely he heard Rex say something about only having been engaged for a week or so. Nobody had been told yet, except old Mrs. Wyecastle. Kenneth did not ever wonder who the nice suitable woman his uncle was about to marry might be. As swiftly as he had plunged into thought he came out of it again.

Old Rex getting married! It was providential! He squared his shoulders for business.

"Oh, this is magni-feek, old chap! Hearty congratulations! And now of course you'll be wanting a house."

"Now you see why I spoke as I did, Ken. When one's very, very happy oneself one naturally desires to see those about one happy too."

"Rather! But you have to snap 'em up quick. The houses I mean. Now I know the very place, furnished or not, just as you like——"

"That's why I want you to take yourself in hand——"

"About what rent would you go to?"

"She's returning to town this afternoon. She's been away. And I may say that this is the crown of my whole life. She's a few years younger than I, but then I don't feel my age. A man's as old as he feels. I walk, I breathe deep, I keep my weight down, I still sometimes punch the ball——"

"And dance, old fellow, what?" cried Kenneth joyously. "Oh, this is most excellent news! Or what about a flat? I know one, fellow off to British East—and there's one thing you must have at once—a car. Two-seater. She'll be to take about and all that, and you've no notion the difference to love's young dream the two-seater's made——"

Hereupon Rex laughed outright, rubbing his hands. After all, Kenneth was his sister's son, and, with all his faults, the only D.S.O. in the family. Doubtless he had had his lesson, and would take better care of his money for the future. There was no reason why he shouldn't do well, with his gift of youth and astonishing spirits.

"Well, you're a light-hearted soul, Kenneth—but

don't let it run away with you, don't let it run away with you."

"Rather not!" was the hearty reply. "And now let's see where we stand. If it's a fair question, what do you pay your little lady?"

"What little lady? Oh, you mean my dancing instructress. Half a guinea for half an hour. Why?"

"Half a—strewth! And I've been peddling fountain pens! And you've no idea at all when you're getting married?"

"Quite soon I hope. Not to my dancing mistress though." Rex laughed again. "What are you doing now?"

For Kenneth had walked away and was absorbedly pacing the room. He muttered indistinguishably and made pencil-jottings on the back of an envelope. Then he began to pace the room in the other direction, from the fireplace to the gallery.

"What on earth are you doing?"

"Thirty couples—say a third off for sitters-out——" came the muttering.

"What *are* you doing?"

Kenneth thrust the envelope into a side-pocket and approached his uncle. He slapped him on the shoulder.

"Well, old fellow, there's only one word for it—it's providential!"

Something had faded indefinably from Rex's face. He sat down on the sofa to watch this, his nephew's latest vagary. "What's providential?" he asked.

"Why, everything happening like this! Now let's go for it baldheaded. First of all tell me how we stand about money, because I should insist on its being on a strict business basis."

A little more of Rex's geniality died away.

"What would have to be on a strict business basis?" he asked.

Kenneth hitched up the knees of his trousers as he sat down beside him. With an explanatory forefinger on a palm he laid his plan before his uncle.

"Here it is in a nutshell. You're getting married. Of course you can't go on living here. New girl new place—obviously. Now let's suppose I can find you a flat or a small house. I've done a bit of that and I know the ropes. Won't cost you a penny as far as I'm concerned. See?"

"No."

"How long's the lease of this place got to run?"

"About seventy years."

"Exactly. We shall all be off the map by then. And it's ours—you and Grannie and Maurice and I each have an interest in it——"

"Let me remind you that your interest's a little overdrawn."

"Just so. That's my handicap. I should start owing the pool that. That's why it's got to be strict business. Now at a guess—in round figures—how much am I on the wrong side?"

"What," Rex asked coldly, "is this rigmarole all about?"

"Rigmarole? It isn't a rigmarole at all. I'll tell you——"

He did so, with masterly lucidity. It may have been no more than a coincidence that as he did so a second piano-organ was heard outside. It was (he told Rex) a question of a small private syndicate that he and a few of his friends were in process of forming. All ex-officers, and of course all sahibs—Rex needn't be uneasy about that! Nor need he worry about the money. There was plenty of money about if you knew where to look for it. And Rex

might take it from Kenneth that it would be a perfectly properly conducted show, with no hanky-panky about it.

The piano-organ played more loudly as Kenneth sketched in the details of a really high-class Dancing Club.

"Perhaps you don't know how these things pay nowadays," he said earnestly. "I don't suppose you knock about as much as I do. And I tell you we've as good as got the money. But we've had rotten luck about premises. That's why this is so providential. There isn't a house in a thousand like this—might have been built for it. Now I don't want you to do anything in a hurry. Take your time. Think it well over. Of course we should want it going by the winter, and there'd be a few alterations to make——"

Slowly Rex rose. He stood frowning down on his nephew.

"Do I hear you aright?" he asked.

"You need have nothing to do with the management. You'd be simply a sleeping partner. We'd go into all that."

Rex's wrath gathered heavily on his brow. "Oh, we'd go into all that?"

"Yes—get it properly valued—I know a chap, used to be in the Blues—he wouldn't charge me a penny——"

"And is *this* the idea you spoke of?"

"Yes. And thirty per cent. in it."

"May I ask, as a mere detail, if your grandmother's to be turned out into the street?"

Kenneth too had risen. He put his hand persuasively on Rex's arm.

"Now look here, old chap, don't go taking a wrong view of it. Of course I've thought of that.

We'd like the whole house if possible, but if you didn't see your way to that she could have rooms at the top. You don't hear anything there. And if it's simply a question of a bit of a noise in the supper-room we could easily put curtains up."

"And your cousin Maurice?"

"Oh, Maurice! I'd fix him! Besides, he'd be a shareholder too."

It was at this point that Rex exploded. Twelve clerks would have quailed had he used that tone at the Office of Organization. He shook off Kenneth's arm as if it contaminated him.

"Then let me tell you now, sir, that such a degrading idea isn't going to be entertained for one single moment!"

Kenneth honestly did not understand. A degrading idea?

"Why, what's the matter with it?" he asked.

"The matter is that this is merely the last straw! Of your personal pride I say nothing, but I should at least have expected a shred of consideration for your family!"

"What's the family got to do with it? You're getting married. If you don't like the idea about Grannie, South Kensington's full of boarding-houses and private hotels that would suit her down to the ground——"

"Our old gun-room! A Night Club!"

"Come, I didn't say a Night Club exactly. Not the way you said it, I mean. And anyway, people don't dance in the mornings" (this time it did slip out) "except you."

Rex's tall figure positively stretched itself an inch.

"Then understand this. We may have come down a bit in circumstances. This room and this little house may be all we have left. It isn't all I could

have wished, but it's ours, and we can still look people in the face. Five generations of Wyecastles have been brought up here, and—yes, please God, another will be! Your grandmother packed away behind curtains in a garret! Swept out into a South Kensington boarding-house while you and I don't know who else——"

"I say, there's nothing the matter with my pals, you know," Kenneth put in rather quickly.

"I saw your monkey antics with that young woman not half an hour ago——"

"Come, I found her here—she was your pal if she's anybody's——"

"Enough of that!" Rex ordered.

Kenneth saw that he had definitely failed. Resignedly he shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing doing then?"

"Yes, sir," Rex cried, "there's this doing! I *will* look into your account! If there's anything owing to you, which I very much doubt, it *shall* be paid, if only for this insult to your upbringing! And after that there'll be not a penny more! Understand that once for all."

Slowly Kenneth walked to the gun-rack where his belongings lay. He took them up—not without a certain measure of care in the handling of the packet he had made of the newspapers, though Rex could not have been much angrier had he left a whole paper-chase of playing-cards and cigars behind him. He passed round the piano and along the gallery, and at the end of the gallery turned. There was neither anger nor disappointment on his face. It showed nothing but sheer failure to understand his uncle's point of view.

"But hang it all," he broke wonderingly out, "why *shouldn't* Grannie be jolly comfortable? And

you're getting married. And Maurice would have his whack——"

But he spoke to the air. All that he saw of his uncle was his cashmere trousers, ascending the steps into the garden outside.

Still wondering what Rex had got into such a paddy about, Kenneth sought his car.

III

A LITTLE MORE OF KENNETH

CERTAINLY he had a car, and, moreover, a title to it as good as most. For is that only yours for which you have paid? What is payment? Gold? There isn't any. Money in the form of notes or of a cheque? Little business would be done if payment on the nail were always demanded in these. A promise, then, to pay, or a promise contingent on somebody else's paying you? Why not? I make my tenner, the difference between the pounds and the guineas goes into your pocket; we have both made a bit, and there is the car, solid value for somebody. The Law will tell you that "credit cannot be taken," but let the Law try to do business on any other terms! The car was as much Kenneth's car as your clothes are your own unless you go to a cash-tailor. It was vested in him for a space to see what he could do with it. And if you think that half the soft-collared, flat-pocketed young men you see leaning negligently back and

steering with one finger possess their cars on very different terms you have a good deal to learn about these things. Kenneth sounded his horn as he swung out of the Square towards the Brompton Road. Then he turned eastward in the direction of Piccadilly.

So that was that. He was not seriously ruffled by his uncle's rebuff. After all, it left him little the worse off. Only the unexpected announcement that Rex was going to be married had brought the golden prospect for a moment tantalizingly near. Also another chance of trading the car seemed to have gone west, but this too, since he had not reckoned on it, he could take with equanimity. For the rest, his morning had even been in some small degree profitable. By his side as he drove were the Mellins and the Glaxo, put there by the dependable Edwards. If he wanted to smoke a cigar there were several capital ones among his sporting papers. And, also to the good, tucked away in his pocket, was a card. It was that of the little eye-maker in black satin who was teaching his uncle to dance.

By Jove, if he ever did get premises, she would be just about IT for a professional!

But fancy old Rex dancing! Kenneth, airily steering, laughed. That, he supposed, was an offering on the nuptial altar. He wondered for a moment who the suitable person to whom his uncle was engaged might be. Then an attractive face in a car that slowed down alongside engaged his attention, and the thought passed out of his head.

Cars were not allowed to stand immediately before the establishment for which Kenneth was bound, so, with extended arm, he turned into the side street, descended, and sought his destination on foot. The half-basement in which he presently found himself was one much frequented at that hour of the day

by Kenneth and his friends. Craddock, in fact, was already there, his gloves by his small glass on the counter, his stick crooked over the counter's edge. Kenneth saw his head between other heads, high in the drift of cigarette-smoke. He made his way between two intervening men, and Craddock, turning, caught his eye.

"Well?" said Craddock.

Kenneth screwed up his mouth.

"Washout?" said Craddock.

"Wouldn't hear of it. Blythe been in yet?"

"He's coming. What's yours?"

"Oh, thanks. Gin-and-It. Have a cigar."

There was a pause, during which drinks were brought.

"So he wouldn't?" Craddock resumed.

Again Kenneth's mouth was pursed. "Absobloominglutely final."

"Well, here goes——"

"Happy days——"

Similarly brief, similarly pregnant, were half the conversations that took place in that smoke-wreathed electric-lighted, entresol bar. Men had a way of omitting the names of those of whom they spoke; no names no pack-drill. It was "he," or "no, the other feller," and many meanings were never uttered at all. An almost promiscuous publicity hid away worlds of privacies. Your nod or lifted eyebrow was not the same as your neighbour's, and his dropped lid was not intended for the couple with their heads together over the hiding newspaper there. It might be a car, an option, something from a stable, a turnover on commission, a deal in bulk, anything. You cannot be too careful nowadays, and Craddock, who was a tall, pallid ex-Captain of Engineers, understood perfectly that Chacey had "approached" his uncle

in the matter of premises for the dancing club and had been refused.

"Going to try your Harrowby woman now?" he asked.

"Might. We'll see what Blythe has to say. Here he is."

The opening of the door set the smoke once more in eddies, and another tall young man entered. A cheerful "That's all right, young feller" was heard in reply to somebody's sudden "Sorry!" The reason for the apology became plain when there was thrust forward a pin-stripe navy-blue shoulder with an empty right sleeve pinned up to the breast beneath it. Blythe did not say "Well?" as Craddock had done. A pair of friendly brown eyes in a friendly brown face spoke the word for him. This time Kenneth did not even purse his mouth.

"Off?"

"Stone cold."

"Well, it's as cheap sitting as standing. Make room in the body o' the kirk. I'm lunching with her Ladyship in half an hour."

"Better have a double one then," said Craddock.

"Have a cigar," said Kenneth.

Of their small syndicate, Blythe and another man not present were the two who had undertaken to find the money. Blythe was thirty-five, by some years the oldest of them; and Nature had bestowed on him the crowning gift of charm. Were the drawing-room or restaurant never so crowded, his brown eyes made of everybody and everything else a mere background for the person to whom he was talking. This gift, added to the loss of his arm, had determined his not-easily-definable profession. We shall come to Lady Howmuch, of Ware, by and bye; let it suffice for the present that it is surely commendable in a lady

who has jumped up in the world rather suddenly that she should be eager to demean herself as befits her new station. A little discreet prompting may be necessary before she is able to do this. Blythe, as prompter, saw no reason why his good offices should not have their market value.

And, for all his charm, he was not the man, whether for himself, the floating of the syndicate, or for any other purpose whatever, to waste time in looking for money where money was not.

He resumed, leaning across Craddock to speak to Kenneth as they sat on the upholstered couch against the wall.

"So he wouldn't? I suppose that's because of his marriage?"

Kenneth was surprised. He himself had only heard of his uncle's intended marriage that morning, but here was Blythe, who apparently knew all about it. But his surprise passed. After all, he seldom went to his uncle's house unless to do a little modest scrounging or to see his grandmother, of whom he was fond, and the orbits of his activities and Rex's did not often cut one another. But he might as well know what Blythe knew.

"Who told you he was going to be married?" he asked.

"My dear chap, I move in the best circles," Blythe replied. "A charming kid too, I hear."

"Who is she?" Kenneth asked.

Blythe laughed.

"Who is she? Nice sort of interest *you* take in your aunts-elect, I must say! Are you pulling my leg?"

"No. I don't go there much. He only told me this morning, and I was thinking about you know what."

"Well, she's a Miss Paull—Miss Una Paull. Not that I've met her."

"Oh!" said Kenneth; and he added with barely a check, "Where are you lunching with her ladyship?"

He was perfectly sure that nothing in his manner had given him away. Indeed, for the next minute or two he found it quite easy to take his share in the conversation, to answer their questions, to ask questions of his own. But deep down within him he marvelled that he should be able to do this. The arrival of a thunderbolt in that underground lounge could not have been less expected than Blythe's news. So, like some going machine that cannot be stopped instantaneously, his functions seemed to run on for a little time longer, automatically and of their own momentum. He actually heard himself saying, quite calmly in answer to some question of Craddock's, "Thirty couples would have to be the bare minimum——"

Una Paull! And engaged to Rex! Una Paull was the "suitable woman" whose name he had not even asked! No, it was too much. He could not take it in. A short moment ago he hadn't known it; surely a minute hence he must un-know it again! Then it would be excised from his consciousness, and the two halves of his life would join neatly up together again.

Una! And his uncle!

"No, these are mine," he heard his own voice speaking again. "Same again, Dot——"

Then, all in a moment, he had an almost irresistible impulse to run away from the mere idea of it, as more than once he had wanted to run away from a physical danger in the war. And from that stage to the next —recognition—took not a fraction of time. Instan-

taneously the whole thing possessed his consciousness. Emotional crises such as that that overwhelmed Kenneth Chacey can be experienced just as well in a subterranean bar in Piccadilly as anywhere else.

A moment later he was, literally, running away. He was on his feet. He couldn't think here, in this place of glasses and smoke and masses of standing men. And the strange thing was that he spoke exactly as if nothing had happened.

"By Jove, I've forgotten something! What's the time? I must dash! See you later."

He had already pushed past them, was at the door.

"Aren't you going to finish your drink?" said Craddock, staring.

"Haven't time——"

And as the door closed behind him, "What's the matter with the Major this morning?" said Dot the barmaid.

Kenneth wanted to walk. The car would be all right where it was for a bit. As he passed it his eyes fell on the packages on the seat. They seemed to take him back to that familiar room where he had so lately talked to his uncle. In that room Rex had been taking a dancing lesson—in order to dance with Una Paull!

It is as well that there should be no misunderstanding about Kenneth. He was as ordinary a young man as you would find. Quite sincerely, he would not have given twopence for his own brains as compared with those of lots of fellows. If he read a book, ten to one it was "Gals' Gossip" or one of the cruder detective yarns. If he looked at a picture it was in a topical magazine or else one of the framed photographs outside Daly's. He thought that all that was wrong with the gramophone was that you could not slow it down without dropping its pitch,

and his general-knowledge-paper included such information as how many of the figures on a Treasury note a sixpence would cover, how many threepenny bits could be got on to half a crown, and how many times the letter H occurs on the end of a twenty-packet of Gold Flake cigarettes.

And it should be added that he knew perhaps half of Mr. Kipling's "If."

But this is not to say that he had not had his vision of sorts, nor that he had not even made, after his own fashion, his attempt to enshrine it. It was a long time ago now, and it seemed even longer when he reflected that in those days he had still had gratuity money to fling about. And there had been nothing, or next to nothing, between Una and himself. How could there have been anything, and she not then seventeen? No. The enshrining had taken quite a different form. It had taken the form of telling himself, with a half-flush as if it had been something to be ashamed of, that it was stupid, when you came to think of it, the way fellows rotted about, filling themselves up with a lot of drinks just because somebody else had them, and smoking too many yellow perils, and letting themselves go all to pieces, and going on the way they did, when there were topping little kids like Una Paull about. A pity they grew up in a way; they ought to stop like that, innocent sort-of, and—oh, he didn't know what was the word for it! He wouldn't have dreamed of kissing her, which meant that he did dream of that very thing, but wouldn't for his life have done it. You kept that sort of thing for the girls you met knocking about, the sort that could take care of themselves and were never without a cock-tail in front of them and twelve inches of cigarette-holder in their mouths. This other dear little kid made him

hate the thought of all that. Laugh if you like, but he dashed well meant it, and he almost wished somebody *would* look at her the wrong way, so that he might have a word with them afterwards about it.

So Kenneth had made his vows, and had not had a drink till six o'clock in the evening if he could decently get out of it, and had taken to smoking a pipe with only an occasional cigarette in between, and had run through the good old jerks before breakfast, and had learned half of Mr. Kipling's "If." And he had done a bit of vague thinking about his future. There was, for example, a pamphlet on Forestry, published by the Organization Office for the information and encouragement of such as he. A life of that sort would suit him down to the ground. He knew of places in Herefordshire where they still barked the oaks in the spring, and, though he was a little uneasy about those brains of his, he had still thought that with a bit of luck he might get his papers through, pass an exam or so, and come out as a District Officer or whatever they were called, at £800 a year, travelling exes, a free cottage, and Una and himself married by the time she was nineteen, say. He remembered all this somewhere in Conduit Street, as he stood (though he didn't know what had made him stop) in front of a breeches-maker's window, where the lower half of a man, from waistband to spurs, sat astride of a dummy saddle.

Then one day had come that ghastly chit from Cox's, informing him, when he could have taken his oath that he still had heaps in hand, that he was overdrawn.

Slowly he moved away from the breeches-maker's window and turned towards Regent Street.

What had followed seemed so much of a piece with his present circumstances that he did not so much

remember it as live it again, live it still. True, it had come gradually, and not in any one particular, but as a sort of staleness in everything, as if some exhilarating element had been withdrawn from the air. The fellows one knew, for example. Jolly good fellows they had been, and Kenneth had known where to find them, night after night, the same little jolly intimate crowd. Then after a while it had occurred to Kenneth that he hadn't seen So-and-so for a week or more, and then that somebody else seemed to have disappeared. Some had got jobs, some had deliberately cut down the expense of sociability. New ones might take their places, but they were not the same. And by this time he knew that other young men than he had read that pamphlet on Forestry. Against the brains of these Kenneth would not have had a chance in any case. Indeed, things in general had seemed less and less worth making an effort for, less and less worth resisting. His pipe had become mislaid, back had crept the cigarettes again. Why should he make a hard-and-fast rule about gin-and-bitters before lunch? There were all sorts of minor pickings in the way of business to be snapped up in that sociable half-hour. He had had all the jerks he wanted in the Army, so why make peace-time a burden with them?

What had become of "If" he no longer knew.

He turned into Regent Street, well aware of the memory that was coming next.

For bit by bit the vision too had faded. It had gone like a light dying out or something settling over the eyes. A few efforts at recapture, each of them slightly more difficult than the last, and not much of it had remained. What, after all, was the good of going about with his head in the clouds? Better face the facts. They'll face you if you don't. One

fact already faced him, namely, that there is a financial point below which any attempt to save money is a mere waste of hope, strength, time and money's-worth. His gratuity, intact, would not have been sufficient to marry on. Some fellows, he knew, could marry successfully on an overdraft, but Kenneth was not clever enough for that. He was merely clever enough to get what he could while he could, and not fool enough by this time to try to save to no purpose. This is tried wisdom, but it is destructive of visions.

He did not often think now of the episode that had completed the vision's destruction. Once more, what was the good? If for a time little candles of penitence and remorse had burned secretly within him—and he wasn't sure on the whole that any had—they were long since puffed out. What! On an Armistice Night! If a fellow couldn't give himself a bit of rope on an Armistice Night, when could he? A bit of a lark once in a while—what about it? Everybody had been shaking a loose leg except for a few pussy-foots and wowsers. Why did they get up these things if a fellow wasn't to enjoy them? For a lot of fat tradesmen to make a bit, with their flags and theatre-bookings, their dancing-ramps and supper-profiteering with a strip of new figures pasted down the side of the wine-list? Was that all? Did the hush at eleven o'clock in the morning only mean that your pockets were to be plundered at eleven o'clock at night? To the devil with it. Kenneth intended to enjoy himself in his own way.

And what though the two girls he had been with weren't exactly—er—well, whatever you like to call it? A bit loud, if you like, but how was he to have known that Una Paull was going to be there, sitting three or four tables away, her proud face high, pre-

tending, he supposed, not to see him? At any rate she hadn't done all the pretending. He had pretended too. He had gone on with his talking and laughing, occasionally staring straight past her as if she hadn't been there. Was he to sit moping at home on an Armistice Night just because he hadn't a couple of duchesses to take about? When Kenneth took girls out he took them out, and to a decent place if he happened to be in funds. And he looked after them, no matter who they were.

So he hadn't even glanced at Una Paull when he had danced with one of his companions within a yard of her table, and he had taken good care to keep out of her way ever since.

And so much for the vision.

He was past Oxford Circus, past Gilbey's, past the ABC places and the furriers and dry-cleaners and bead-shops, walking towards Tottenham Court Road. At the crossing near the Horse Shoe he hesitated. Dancing and the places where one danced were for ever on his mind, and there were dancing-rooms and to spare in that neighbourhood. Just up the street was Rector's. A little farther along was Murphy's. There was the place in Gerrard Street, there were half a dozen other places. The front doors of all of them would be locked at that hour of the day; inside they would be sweeping, dusting, vacuum-cleaning; but Kenneth knew of side doors and inconspicuous bells. Men whose ambition it is to run a dancing club do well to keep in touch with these places that open their doors at about the hour when you and I are going to bed.

But he changed his mind and passed on, and in New Oxford Street crossed to the north side of the road. It was rarely that he was entirely without money. He merely never had enough of it to do

anything worth doing with it. That afternoon he had nearly three pounds in his pocket, and he was inclined to fancy Lovelightly for the three-thirty. Therefore, near a toy-shop, he turned into a commissionaire-guarded doorway and walked along a passage that resembled the entrance of a shooting-gallery. Then he passed through double doors and gave up his hat, stick and gloves. A high gallery ran round the whole interior, from one portion of which came the click of billiard-balls. Over the rail of another part of it could be seen the heads of lunchers. An elevated boxing-ring occupied the centre of the long hall, and high up the stairs was the apparatus for the taking of flashlight photographs. The whole of the farther end of the room was filled with seats set out after the manner of stalls at a theatre. The drama that was being enacted took place on an enormous blackboard, where boys with long pointers changed movable numbers on tin plates and whined out the names of horses. A score of men made up the audience. Kenneth sat down in a stall near the end of the row.

To the eye of vision it was oddly interesting. From time to time men filled in slips, which were collected, but that inner eye saw them not. It was fixed on scenes vastly different and far away. It saw, beyond that towering, figure-chequered blackboard, far-away racecourses, with people who moved about the paddocks and enclosures, and parties at luncheon, and the men who cried the odds. All this was no trouble to one. One sat in one's stall and smoked and the tape did the rest.

But Kenneth presently forgot that he had come there to bet. His ten-shilling note, which was the minimum stake, remained in his pocket. He was thinking of Rex and Una again.

Or rather he was thinking more particularly of Una once more. And what Kenneth thought, though it might lack the larger imaginativeness, had at least the detailed precision that came of a certain familiarity with the proceedings of Boards of Officers and the conduct of Courts Martial. There seemed something oddly accidental about the whole situation. He could account for Rex's position. Kenneth had hardly listened to him when he had announced his engagement. He had been full of his own project of the dancing club, had tried to let him a house or a flat, had endeavoured to work off the two-seater on him. Rex had hardly been able to get a word in edgeways.

But what about her? It looked as if she had never so much as mentioned Kenneth to Rex. Now one hardly becomes engaged to a man without at least saying, "I think I met your nephew some time ago." Three conclusions seemed possible. They were (*a*) that Una had thought so casually of Kenneth that she had not thought the acquaintance worth remembering, which Kenneth did not believe. Next (*b*), Una might have been unaware that any relationship existed, to which theory the difference of their names lent a certain amount of colour. And lastly (*c*), it was not impossible that he had so queered himself that Armistice Night that she had shut him thenceforward entirely out of her thoughts.

And here one would have liked to write quite a number of romantic things about Kenneth. One would have liked to say that he flushed duskily, that he heard the beating of his own heart, that his eyes swam with tears, so that he no longer saw the changing figures on the vast board. He ought by rights to have seen her face again, floating mistily before his eyes. He ought to have heard her voice again

as he had last heard it. But that was not Kenneth, and his story cannot be written in that way. Think what you like about him, but do not take him for something he is not. Yesterday he was made much of, to-morrow he may no longer exist. Now, to-day, is the time to know him, or at least to refrain from theorizing about him. As events have shaped his destiny he will answer for himself. So this is what actually happened:

Somebody strolled up behind him and spoke to him.

"Hallo, Chacey, old fruit, having forty winks?"

Kenneth sat alertly up.

"Hallo, young Trouble, when did you blow in?"

"Coming in with me for five bob on Satan the Second?"

"H'm—I rather fancied Lovelightly."

"Lovelightly? Not a hope in Hell!"

"You no thinkee?"

Followed talk highly technical; and as his friend put his leg over the back of the seat and sat down by him, quite a cheering thought occurred to Kenneth. Rex had promised in his anger that he would go into the accounts of the Kensington house. Kenneth knew that as regarded his own interest in that house he was pretty deeply dipped, but he did not think he was totally immersed. Even when his numerous advances had been reckoned off there might still be a bit to come.

IV

THE OLDER WINE

Rex, returning to the Boys' Room after Kenneth had left him, was a little sorry that he had broken out on his nephew as he had done. This was not entirely because he disliked to appear undignified in his own eyes. It was true that Kenneth sometimes behaved like a common mountebank, and his lack of proper pride in his family was sometimes distressing; but somehow Rex had begun to be not quite comfortable in his mind about Kenneth. There are people of whom one is fond as long as one is in their company, yet who irritate again the moment their backs are turned. With Kenneth it was just the other way. His presence—his slack jauntiness, his seedy smartness, even his nicotined fingers—sorely tried Rex's patience. If only he could be induced to make an effort! So much was being done for him and the thousands like him if he only knew it! The results might not show yet. Many matters must take precedence. The most urgent of these was that things should be kept going at all. Rex was daily made aware how nearly the bottom had fallen out of the whole system of Organization. But Kenneth saw with his own eyes only. He seemed indifferent to the heavy labours that were undertaken on his behalf. It might seem to Kenneth, if ever he gave it a thought at all, that the machine knocked and rattled, but Rex knew that it had not yet come to a standstill. Outside the machinery almost everybody was extraordinarily decent. Employers,

already running at a loss, had taken on men to the saturation point and beyond. Private benevolence had responded magnificently. Whichever way one turned one found appeals, appeals, appeals. Therefore Kenneth must learn to be patient. That was all there was to be said about it. Until trade was restored there could be little for Kenneth or anybody else.

And what about Kenneth himself? What was *he* doing? Was he even trying to help? No. His idea of social usefulness was to start—what? A dancing club! Good God! That was to be *his* contribution to the unparalleled, the unimaginable needs of his time! Rex was to labour all day, and to sit far into the night with his head in his hands—while Kenneth founded a dancing club!

At this thought Rex began to feel a little better. The weight of his nephew was lighter on his mind. Kenneth might still be helped as occasion arose, but he must first learn to help himself.

And, as Rex's own absence from the Organization Office, highly unusual at that hour of the day, was due to a specially-made appointment that bore directly on these things, it was time he was off to keep it.

But as he was turning to leave the room Edwards appeared. He carried a salver with a telegram upon it, and there was hesitation in his manner.

"Is that for me?" Rex asked.

"Yes, sir. And Miss Paull's here, sir."

He stood aside to allow somebody to pass.

Una here already! Rex had supposed she was not returning from Buckingham till the afternoon train!

"Una! Has anything happened?" he exclaimed. Then his manner changed. He turned to Edwards. "Let my mother know at once." Then, turning to

the girl again, "Shall we lunch here—it will have to be immediately I'm afraid—or shall we go out?"

"Wait a bit, Rex, please," she said hurriedly. "I expect that's my telegram. I wired you. I want to speak to you for a moment——"

"All right, Edwards. I'll ring."

"And the lady in the car, sir?" the butler asked.

"What lady? What car?"

Again came the girl's voice.

"It's all right, Rex. She motored me. She was passing the door anyway. I motored. She dropped me. She was stopping with them. I wired you. It's Winnie—Mrs. Harrowby."

"Go and see if Mrs. Harrowby's still there, Edwards."

As he had talked Rex had advanced along the gallery. He led his fiancée down into the room.

Would he have seen the unsuitability of it had it been somebody other than himself? Did he in his heart already see it, while refusing to see it? She was only a very little over twenty. Something of isolation, of forlornness even, seemed to invest her young figure as she stood there in the copied room in her motor-coat and small red hat with the dyed quill, the slip of a girl's frock beneath, the cream stockings and the buckled shoes. "New girl new place—obviously!" Kenneth had sought to beguile his uncle. He had been wiser than he knew. She was no more meant to live in that room than she was meant to live in a museum. She was unguessably linked up, not with anything for which that transplanted piece of Herefordshire stood, but with a time to come. To-morrow, and the morrows after that waited for her. But between her and them rose the obstacle of To-day. Until that should be over-

stepped or avoided, her life could not begin. Canaans lay beyond, flowing with milk as fresh as her own breasts, with honey as golden as the tendrils about her nape, but that Sinai must first be climbed.

Yet there was courage in the light wide-apart blue eyes, resolution in the small straight mouth. She would adventure.

But not with him—never with him. He would remain on the mountain. He would watch her figure departing, losing itself in the radiance as it went. And he ought to have known it then—and perhaps did.

"Something's the matter, darling," he said gently. "What is it?"

"I'm perfectly all right," she answered; and, if she meant in health, her face, lightly browned from her stay in the country, confirmed her words. It was her manner that belied them, first by the little effort with which she summoned her courage, then with its sudden little failure.

"There's something I want to tell you—and last night I was awake for hours and hours, worrying——"

Instantly he was all tender solicitude. He took her hand and led her to the sofa.

"What do you say? You haven't been sleeping? Come over here. Take your hat off. Put your feet up. I'm going to order lunch here, at once, just for you and me."

"No, no—I'm quite all right——"

"But you haven't been sleeping——"

"It's nothing——"

"It must be something——"

"No——"

"No? Then"—his tall figure was bent over the

sofa and his eyes were adoringly on her—" then—if you're quite all right——? "

His eyes asked for the rest.

But she dropped her feet to the ground again. She refused him the " Good morning " for which the eyes so plainly asked.

" No, no—they'll be coming in——"

" They? Who? "

" We can be seen from the garden——"

" There isn't anybody in the garden."

" Please don't worry me, Rex——"

And suddenly she got up and put half the width of the room between them.

He ought to have known better than to seek to diminish the distance, but his breast had risen of itself at the sight of her. She had removed her hat; she was adjusting the golden hair.

" I've been thinking, Rex——"

And he ought to have known better than to say what he did, but her very voice was melody to him. He smiled.

" Oh? And what thoughts were those? "

It was the tone. She turned her back on him and walked to the piano.

" I do wish you wouldn't talk to me as if I was twelve," she replied.

And oh, if he valued his happiness, he ought not to have taken a step towards her, with outstretched arms, as she stood with her hand upon the piano lid; but she had the loveliest hands, that could play on his heart-strings as if they had been the chords of a harp.

The next moment she was on the music-stool, with the hands poised over the keys, ready to fall.

Mortified, he turned away.

But if for the moment the kiss was denied, he

knew very well that that too must be as she wished. It was not the first time that he had feared to frighten her. Only once had the kiss not finally been granted, and that was when he had failed to conceal his chagrin. That must not be allowed to happen a second time. Her fingers had touched the keys. Softly, pearlily, the notes sounded through the Boys' Room. Suddenly he turned, smiling almost as brightly as Kenneth himself.

"I've got a bit of news for you, Una," he said. "You'll never guess."

"What?" she asked.

"I'm learning to dance."

"Oh?"

"Yes. To dance, if you please! Why shouldn't I? Everybody does."

"That will be nice," she replied.

"So you can be choosing your favourite place. Piccadilly? Hyde Park? What's that other place that sounds like a church—Bishops' or something—Vicars'—no, Rectors? Never mind, we'll dance at them all!" Then he expanded gaily. "Do you know, darling, I know a man who's only just learning to dance, and whatever do you think for? To dance with his daughter! He wants to give her a surprise—and doesn't want too many young men hanging about, I suppose. You needn't be afraid *I* shall be like that! *I* shan't want to keep you in my pocket all the time!" A deeper note crept into his voice. "Stop playing with one hand." He lifted the hand to his lips, which she suffered. "Darling, darling!" he breathed, and murmured to the hand, not the "Pale Hands I Love" of the restaurants, but something of an earlier time:

"'Happy ye leaves, whenas those lily hands
That hold my life in their dead-doing might——'"

Despite her preoccupation she could not but be sensible of his nearness and devotion. When he spoke to her like that he was not very far from bridging the gulf between them. She sat with her eyes closed for a moment.

" You do that too—it's your voice," she faltered.

" Darling, darling! " he breathed. " Is there anything you don't mean to me? Oh, you're everything. Things you'd think had nothing to do with one another, like dancing and saying one's prayers, and enjoying one's meals and laughing and trying to think gently of people—you seem to bring them all together——"

" Don't."

" People wonder why I never got married before, but *I* know——"

" I believe you know when you're doing this——"

" I wasn't rich enough. I hadn't enough to give. No man has enough to give any woman. No young man has anything to give at all. They want everything given——"

Whether he would have had the kiss in another moment cannot be known. All at once she jumped up, clear away from the piano. She shook herself, as if to shake off some spell that was weaving itself about her.

" Yes—it's when you say those things, in that voice——"

" There are sweeter things to come——"

" Anyway "—she said it quickly lest it should not be said at all, and the blue eyes were on his—" anyway, I want to talk to you about Winnie."

He did not want to talk about Winnie. It was already too much that Winnie had driven her to his door. But something warned him that here he had better go warily.

" You mean Mrs. Harrowby? "

" Yes. I call her Winnie. We're friends."

" Well, what about her? "

Una Paull made a petulant gesture with her hands.

" Oh, I suppose it isn't any good really! " she exclaimed impatiently.

" What isn't any good? "

" Pretending to like a person when you can't bear them."

He thought for a moment.

" By the way, did you know that Mrs. Harrowby was to be staying in the same house you've been in? "

" Yes."

" You knew that before you went? "

" Yes. Do you mean you'd have told me not to? "

He went more warily still. " Need we say ' told,' dearest? " he softly reproached her.

" Oh, we may as well have it out! I get sick of beating about the bush! You mean her case. I can tell by the way you say it."

" I certainly haven't forgotten Mrs. Harrowby's divorce."

She was on the point of making a retort, but suddenly changed her mind and interceded. She seemed a child, begging for something not good for her, but begging none the less.

" She's been *so* kind, Rex—and you were just talking about thinking gently of people."

His voice was quiet. " All this is leading up to something, Una. What is it? "

And then he had it without further words.

" It's leading up to this, that she's offered me a job in her firm and I'm taking it—there! "

Little had distinguished the Harrowby case from a thousand other cases at much the same time.

Merely, a woman of thirty or so, wearying of an elderly husband, and swept away in the maelstrom of sexual reflexes that had accompanied the growling bass of the war like a feverish treble, had gone off with a penniless Captain, and, seeing nothing very much in this that committed her to a second alliance for life, had neglected or refused to marry him. But to Rex the episode loomed large for two reasons. The first of these was his reverential attitude to women and the marriage vow. The second was the part he himself had played in the case. He might have been wiser to have minded his own business; but Harrowby was his friend and neighbour, he had been hardly-used, and it might be that at that time Rex's judgments had inclined to severity. At any rate he had lent Harrowby the money to get rid of his wife. It had seemed an act of strict justice, and he had not looked further. There had been no question of damages from the penniless Captain. With the borrowed money Harrowby had paid his wife's costs, and after that she had had to shift for herself. This she had done with a considerable measure of success. She was not the woman to stick fast. Whether, either, she was the woman to forget a hostile act had not up to this moment occurred to Rex. But it did so now. The intervening years seemed to roll away. He heard her demure soft voice again, saw again the dark, clever eyes. It struck him for the first time that he might have made an enemy, and that that enemy might, if she were so disposed, make him aware of it through the thing that lay nearest to his heart.

He looked earnestly into Una's eyes and spoke very gently.

"I've known Mrs. Harrowby for a good many years, Una."

But she now stood her ground. She met his look.

"I know you have. That's why really you don't know her as well as I do. You've made up your mind about her. I've got a fresher eye."

Troubled as he was he could not restrain a smile. So naïve, so like her! But, once more, he ought not to have fondled her head with his hand nor to have said "You dear!" for she bridled.

"Yes, and that's another thing you do—make me frightfully fond of you one minute and patronize me the next!"

He was exceedingly sorry. He had not meant for a moment to patronize her, he said. And then a borrowed phrase slipped from her lips.

"And I do think that when an unhappy woman braves the opinion of the world——"

He was startled. "Eh?"

"——and has the courage to slap a lot of stupid old conventions in the face——"

"What? May I ask if this is her picture of herself?"

"Well, I just don't care!" the girl broke out. "I'm on her side! And I'm not going just to play the piano and have poetry said about my hands! She's always nice about you—she admits she got the idea of her business from you——"

"That's nothing to me——"

"She says so, perfectly frankly, and so you're misjudging her again."

He was gently explanatory.

"My darling child, I wasn't the first to have a room copied. You speak as if I was—or perhaps she's persuaded you to. Waring and Gillows do it. Hamptons do it. Lots of people do it. And Harrowbys are perfectly entitled to do it."

"You mean you just don't like her."

" I cannot accept her version of her case as being in every respect an accurate one, and for quite other reasons I could wish that this had not happened."

" I can put it ever so much shorter than that. You don't like her."

" I may happen incidentally not to, but that is not the question."

Indeed, the question for him was far more profound. Those glib phrases, " stupid conventions," " braving the opinion of the world," stuck in his throat. He knew that women would be the first to suffer were those conventions to be abolished. But then he knew so many things that she had still to learn, perhaps with suffering and tears. And he did not know where to begin to teach her. There could hardly be a beginning. He could only substitute the thoughts and ideas he wished her to have for these undesirable vapourings, this still less desirable acquaintance. His task seemed to stretch away before him like a vista, of wise and tactful forestallings, of suppressions and shelterings, of guidances so gentle that she would not know she was being guided, of soft temperings and mouldings of her young mind. But at the end of it all he saw her, radiant, perfect after his own pattern. He had spoken in all humility when he had said that at the last no man has anything to give any woman, but this was not yet the last. And because he knew that this wonder, so late in its coming, could never happen to him again, quietly he took her half-reluctant hands in his.

" Dearest one," he said, " I don't want you to think that I've any rooted objection to women going into business. As an interest. To occupy themselves, or to widen their outlook. In fact I welcome it—provided always it isn't overdone. But there

ought to be proper safeguards. Need it, *need* it be with Mrs. Harrowby, dearest?"

"Yes, it must," she answered abruptly. "That's what I came to tell you. It's settled. I'm to have three pounds a week to start with, and I'm going to begin at once."

He walked away as she withdrew her hands from his. Again he seemed to feel the slight pressure of a will not that of the child to whom he was engaged. Why, if it was all settled, had she said "going to"? He turned again and lifted grave eyes to her.

"Why didn't you tell me all this, Una?"

"You're so difficult to tell things to sometimes. And if you think the way you do about her—well, I mean it would be silly to go on," was her answer.

Dismay was in his eyes, dread filled his heart.

"To go on! Do you mean you and me? Child, what are you saying?"

"Well, wouldn't it? This would be cropping up all the time——"

"Wait, wait—give me a moment——"

He needed it, the poor man. The room seemed to have grown dark about him. Thirty years of waiting, a brief week or two of heavenly fulfilment, and already creeping on the shadow of withdrawal! To the young these things mean little. They get over them, have time before them, are never without a spare heart or so to tide over the season of healing. But for Rex there was no second chance. In this his whole life was packed. For this he had guarded himself from grave errors, had washed away his venial ones with tears. He had kept romance and belief and worship alive in his not-young breast. And now——

"I see," he said again, and the words seemed almost a yielding of his last breath.

Then suddenly a picture seemed to rise before his eyes. It was a picture of his nephew Kenneth, and it moved and changed. First it showed him leaning over the gallery rail, matchbox and unlighted cigarette in his hands and a faint smile (or so Rex imagined) lurking at the corner of his mouth. Then he had vaulted lightly down, had seized his partner practically from his arms, and had danced with her. And what though the rest of the sorry display had been shallow and beneath disdain? Rex confessed at last how bitterly he had envied Kenneth. Probably it was something in the Chacey blood, for he had always been less than half a Wyecastle. Rex himself had husbanded his gifts for some last, late-flowering, sacramental gift of all. Had he then not realized that such hoarding is loss, and that the only giving is the habit of giving, that leaves the giver continually and richly empty?

Or did he realize that even with Kenneth's youth he would still have been fatally Rex Wyecastle, and that Kenneth would still be Kenneth at fifty?

"I see," he said once more. "And so I have my choice?"

"You know perfectly well it would always be cropping up," she said uneasily.

"I have to agree to your going into this business, or——"

"I want to, Rex."

And after all, did it greatly matter whether he consented or not? One way or the other the thing would settle itself. She might weary of the novelty of it in a week. On the other hand, to deny her would only harden her resolution, and give her thenceforward something to hold over him. So, if he must give way, he must do so handsomely. It was the first step in that gentle series of guidances

and substitutions that in the end were to make her his very own. He shouldered his burden.

"Don't misunderstand me, dear," he said with what courage he could. "I think her offer is—quite an opening—certainly a most promising opening——"

At his changed tone she gave a little jump of pleasure.

"Oh, Rex! Then you don't mind?"

"There's always the chance it might lead to something else——"

"Oh, it will! And she's *so* clever, Rex!"

That he had never doubted. "And sometimes—I admit—sometimes a decision is no worse for being taken on the spur of the moment," he conceded.

"So you will?" she cried, and her hands were eagerly outstretched.

He smiled, a tired smile.

"Really, Una, you seem rather to have jumped to the conclusion that I shouldn't," he managed to say.

"Well, she did think that perhaps . . . oh, *how* lovely!"

Lovely too was her quick run to him. It was the lovelier because of the price he undertook to pay for it. And he no longer envied Kenneth as he folded her in his arms.

V

HOMES

WHAT you win at a hundred-to-eight on a ten-shilling stake depends on the average of the totalizator. It happened that Kenneth Chacey left the place in Holborn that afternoon some four pounds richer than he had entered it. Four pounds is much to be preferred to a poke in the eye with a stick, and on the whole Kenneth felt pleased with life. At the edge of the kerb as he came out again a man was playing a fiddle. The strains were interrupted for a moment as Kenneth dropped a couple of sixpences into the hat for luck—his own luck, not the musician's. Then he idled westward along Holborn.

Ahead of him there walked a tall boy in a loose Norfolk jacket and turned-down green velours hat. His grey flannel trousers looked as if he had rapidly outgrown them, and showed four or five inches of coloured sock between their turn-up and the thick black brogues on his feet. He carried a new tennis-racket in a press, and looked student from top to toe. Kenneth, quickening his pace, overtook him, and addressed him from behind in a voice not his own.

"And why, may I ask, are you not at your School of Mines, learning to be a useful member of society?" he demanded. "Here is your country passing through a grave crisis in its history——"

The youth turned an eager face over which no razor had yet passed.

"Hallo, Ken!" he said.

"——a time full of peril and anxiety, and you find nothing better to do with your time than buying new tennis-rackets at Gamages! Well, what's the best of the news, young 'un?"

The best of news, it appeared, was exceedingly good with Maurice Chacey, the young cousin who had been held up as an example to Kenneth that morning. He bubbled over with it. Hardly three hours ago (he told Kenneth), just before lunch in fact, an announcement had been pinned up to the notice-board at the Coll, and in less than two minutes you couldn't get near for fellows fighting to read it. Kenneth should just have seen the mob! The Mines Department, it seemed, wanted a Sub-Assistant-Assayer of sorts, and had put up the job for the students' competition. Was Maurice going in for it? Could ducks swim! You bet Maurice was going in for it, and Maurice was backing Maurice too! Why, it started at four hundred, as much as a Member of Parliament got! And once you got your foot in, and weren't afraid of a bit of work——

"Oh, I *do* hope I get it!" said the boy ecstatically.

"I'm very glad to hear your good news," said Kenneth less severely. "You know, Maurice, I've been genuinely and sincerely distressed about you. Your grandmother's been in the greatest distress about you. Ever since those new hard courts were opened it's been tennis, tennis, tennis—frittering away your time——"

"You should see my new service—swish!" The sweep of the new racket in the press almost took off the head of a passer-by.

"You off home now?"

"Yes."

"Then hop on this bus. I've got a car waiting

if somebody hasn't pinched it. Want to buy a car?"

"Rather have an American-X—crumbs, they *do* streak it! I'm going to have one if I get this job!"

"That the new eight-horse?"

They talked cars and bikes.

Kenneth very much wanted his young cousin to get on. This was neither virtue nor disinterestedness in him, but a desire based on general strategy. It was as well to have in the family as many members as possible to whom to turn in the hour of need. As the bus rumbled along Oxford Street he amused himself by painting fancy pictures of the years ahead. He imagined Maurice, stout and spectacled, but always with a tennis-racket somewhere about (or it might be a bag of golf-clubs by that time), lording it as head of a Department, and himself comfortably installed as secretary or doorkeeper or bottle-washer or something. He had failed to get these desirable jobs from Rex, but he intended that Maurice should be better trained. What was the good of a family if its members did not stand by one another? In this sense Kenneth believed strongly in the family tie.

They changed to the car, sped farther west, and, with a "Cheerioh" and a message of love to grannie, Kenneth dropped his cousin at the corner of the Square. Not one word had he said to Maurice about Rex's engagement. He turned the car in the direction of his own home.

It was rather an unusual thing for him to be doing at that hour of the afternoon. He was not dressing for the evening, and in Kenneth's experience a home was, among other things, a place where one changed one's clothes. "Among other things," one writes, for a home had other uses. It was also (for example)

a place to which one returned, invariably as late as possible, for the purpose of sleeping. Or one might go there for an occasional meal, in a period of temporary stringency when it was not convenient to pay for that meal at once. Or a home might be a sort of bank, where a pound or two won in Holborn or elsewhere might be left in safe custody, or, if the balance happened by any chance to be the other way, where a pound or so might be borrowed. In this last event the interest was worked off, and the general credit maintained, by passing on to a secretary or manageress occasional free theatre paper, stray tickets for cinema trade shows, or a dance invitation if one happened to be going begging. Or at home, by the exercise of a little cajolery, one might get one's mending done for nothing, or one's breakfast brought up to bed of a Sunday morning, or one's chest rubbed when one had a cold. A home might be any of these things, and in Kenneth's experience it was a little bit of all of them. Only one thing it never was. It was never a place you went to untired, gladly and from choice.

And that was why Kenneth was not very often to be found at home.

But this afternoon he had his reasons for returning. First of all there was something, too complicated to go into in detail, about the free garaging of the car in a friend's yard round the corner (for Kenneth only paid for such accommodation when every other means of getting it had failed). Next, it might be prudent to salt down a couple of pounds of his winnings, for Kenneth knew what happened to money when money was carried in pockets. Next, he owed Miss Parratt, the manageress, a pound of which he suspected her to be in need that evening.

And, if a further reason for Kenneth's returning

to his home had been necessary, Radleys', though not much more than a stone's-throw away, did not open its doors to non-residents until half-past five.

So he drew up before a white-portico'd entrance, with shrubs and a sun-awning, snowy steps, a thick rubber mat at the top, with " Salve " upon it, and double doors of mahogany and cut-glass gleaming invitingly beyond. (Rex needn't have turned up his nose at its spick-and-span-ness as a home for grannie, he thought, almost with pride in its exterior !) There were indications that the private hotel consisted of three late-Victorian houses thrown into one. The doors to the right and left of the central one were sealed. For thirty yards or so along the street there was uniformity of window-curtains and of the white glimpses inside. And, embracing the three units like a bracket, the words " *Hôtel Maeterlinck*," in scrolled and gilded letters, stretched over the second-floor windows, as much as to say, " Here I begin, here I leave off; what the homes on either side of me are I don't know."

Kenneth passed up the snowy steps and into his home.

Miss Parratt was not in her little glazed office by the bright red fire-extinguishers, and Kenneth began the ascent to his own room. As he mounted, the shrubs out in the street, the handsome rubber mat at the door, and the other indications of substantiality and comfort that would have suited grannie so admirably, became as it were attenuated memories. The first floor, with its rows of closed white doors and its thick red drugget also became a memory. And the second front floor he never touched at all. Instead, he dived suddenly into a dark branching passage, left behind him the recesses and closets

where brooms and water-jugs and household ladders were kept, and finally ascended a further flight of linoleum-covered stairs that seemed suddenly quite brightly lighted. He opened the door of a narrow apartment that tapered away wedgewise almost to nothing, and closed the door behind him again.

And as a man need not take his hat off in his own home unless he pleases, Kenneth kept his on.

An old British-warm covered his bed. He sat down on it and took out a cigarette. He was about to light it from the last one when suddenly he threw the lighted butt away. Perhaps he would smoke (say) half a dozen fewer in the course of the day if his hand had to fumble in his pocket for a match each time. His hand remained in his pocket, consciously delaying. Behind the door, with a towel over the shoulders to keep the dust off, hung his evening clothes. In front of him, where the fireplace might have been had the room had a fireplace, was ranged his row of boots.

Kenneth was fanciful and old-maidish about his boots. It amused him to keep them, not in an unbroken row, but herring-boned, as it were, in pairs at attention, each boot at an angle of forty-five degrees with its fellow. He never let anybody clean them but himself. Especially he liked to clean the brown ones, and sometimes spent a whole Sunday morning, when Radleys' didn't open till one, in doing so. There was something—he didn't know what the word was—" wistful " was as near as he got—about the feel of them. He took up a pair now and began to polish them with a piece of wash-leather which he drew from under his bed.

Without knocking, Miss Parratt entered. Evidently she had not seen him enter the hotel and did not know he was there, for she stepped momentarily

back. Then she advanced again. She carried his shirts and collars, with a laundry bill pinned to them.

"I've paid it," she said. "And I've put new buttons on them all."

She called him neither "Mr. Chacey" nor yet "Kenneth." What in her heart she did call him was not for him to know. But it sometimes caused her to speak coldly to him, and sometimes to walk abruptly away.

"Buttons?" he said, looking up. "Oh, *most* excellent! What would home be without Par-par! Dancing to-night?" he added.

"No."

"Aha, but I've got your quid, if that's what you mean! And you can hang on to a couple for me too."

"What time are you going to be in?" she asked. She would have sat up for him for hours. Those few minutes, seldom before midnight and often much later, when only the hall-lights burned and she waited to hear the touch of his key in the door, were all of her day that meant anything to her.

"Oh, I might be late," he answered off-handedly. "What do you think of *that* for a polish?" He held up the boot.

"I can have some bovril for you if you like."

"Shan't want it, my dear. Green tea and calf's-foot jelly in the punch—meat and drink in one, eh? What about a spin in the car to-morrow? Steady on, though—'s you were! Can't to-morrow—might be able to the day after——"

But whether at the words "my dear," or for whatever other reason, she had opened the door behind her, and, first picking up a ball of crumpled paper that he had tossed down, was gone.

"Here, you've forgotten the quid!" he called after her.

But the door did not re-open.

He took up the other boot.

Good little sort Par-par was, he thought. For that matter, the world seemed full of decent people, provided they had a thin enough time. Kenneth had known the day when typists and milliners and shop-assistants and people of that sort had seemed very much of a piece to him, but the more you saw of them the less they were to be lumped together in that wholesale fashion. Little Par-par might sew his buttons on, make him bovril in the small hours of the morning, lend him ten bob from time to time. She might be run off her feet, at the beck and call of the whole hotel. Kenneth didn't care a hoot. He would as soon take her out for a blow in the car as anybody else. Of course she was a bit in love with him, but she would get over that. Kenneth had once been in love himself and had got over it.

Still hatted, and with a brown boot on his left hand, his eyes fell on the other boots, and suddenly he gave a little laugh.

He didn't know what had first made him arrange them like that, but it was rather funny when you came to think of it. Kenneth did not boast much of his imagination, but it needed very little imagination to picture them at attention there, for all the world like a recruits' squad in the days when the rush had outstripped the equipment. They seemed a long time ago, those days when the lads had fallen in in blue overalls or boiler-suits or whatever else they happened to stand up in. There, for example, at the end of the row, were his heavy walking-boots —that chap had joined up straight from the fields.

Next to them was a pair of light town-shoes—that fellow had walked into the nearest recruiting office out of the street. A pair of patent-leathers stood on parade straight from a dance, like What's-his-name on the eve of Waterloo. A cloth-topped pair had descended the office steps, and, for all Kenneth knew, had found the office door closed against him when he had come back again.

And one very old pair of gym-shoes, long unworn but never thrown away, had stepped into it, like Kenneth, straight from school.

Kenneth, sitting there on the edge of the bed with the British-warm on it, smiling and with the boot still on his hand, took it into his idle head to drill that row of boots. A raw lot like that must have the fear of God put into 'em right away. Precisely so he had had the fear of God put into him, precisely so, when promotion had come, he had taken it out of a newer lot still.

" Boots—*'shun!* " he commanded softly. " Stand-aaaat—*ease! 'Shun! Number!* "

" One—Two—Three—Four——" the boots replied, in voices as diverse as themselves.

" 'S you were! *Number!* . . . Move to the right in fours—form fours—*right!* By the left, quick—*march!* "

Then he laughed at himself. " Silly ass! " he said, and got up. As he did so a neighbouring clock struck half-past five.

Bon! He would just wash his hands, give his hair a touch, and hey for Radleys'.

Ten minutes later he had passed out of the Maeterlinck, had completed that complicated arrangement about the garaging of the car, and was on his way to meet his friends in another of his homes.

You may think you know Radleys'—that portly family hotel hard by that could have swallowed up half a dozen Maeterlincks. You may say that you stayed there years ago, that you were married from there, that you knew the head-waiter when he was a boy. But there may still be things about Radleys' that you don't know. You may not know, for example, that corner of it that Kenneth and his friends have made a good deal their own. It is the corner near the billiard-room, and its " dispense " has two ends and does a double duty. We, you and I, probably never see our end of this dispense. We, residing there for a week or a month or permanently, merely give our orders and what we want is brought to us. But from the other end the mechanism is visible. There are congregated the young men who seldom leave their hats in the cloak-room. They see the heads of the waiters—your waiter or mine—dip under a glass hatch beyond the bottles. They hear the number of our wines called out, say " So-and-so's doing himself well to-night," and see the spiking on wire files of the paper slips at which we shall presently grumble. They also see and hear a great number of other things—for our home is also theirs whether we wish it or not. The Licensing Laws will have it this way. It is less privately theirs than ours. They can, in fact, only enter and remain during certain hours not determined by themselves. Still, a home is a home; and, if this subject of homes may be pursued, as Kenneth puts down his (or rather his uncle's) Mellins and Glaxo with his hat and stick on the top of them—if the subject may be pursued as he nods to Blythe (whom he finds waiting for him and to whose home he is going on presently)—if the subject of homes may be dwelt on a little, without rubbing anything in or laying anything at anybody's

door—if, for the satisfaction of our curiosity, the homes of Kenneth and his friends may delay us for one moment longer . . . very well. Kenneth's very first words to Blythe were not without interest.

"Well, which of your town-houses is it to be to-night?" he asked.

It would have appeared from this that Blythe had at least two town-houses at his command. And so in one sense he had. But in another sense he had not. Like the garaging of Kenneth's car, the calculations involved were a little abstruse. Blythe, in fact, had two homes, a home-and-a-half, a home, or half-a-home, according to circumstances.

Of these circumstances the factor of time was a governing one. Had that factor been a constant one all would have been plain sailing, or rather plain lodging. But Craddock was sometimes away for three or four days, sometimes for ten or twelve, and seldom knew until the last moment when he would be back. Similarly, Massingham and Ferrers came and went for uncertain periods, either or both of them.

For Blythe coxed-and-boxed it incessantly and bewilderingly. Craddock's home would not hold two men, the home which Massingham and Ferrers shared would not hold three. Four men, three beds, two homes—there you had it in a nutshell. Blythe had two homes in that he was sometimes at one place and sometimes at the other. He had a home-and-a-half if Craddock *plus* either Ferrers or Massingham was away at the same time. He had a home, all to himself, in Craddock's absence. He equally had one, with power to put up a visitor, if neither Massingham nor Ferrers was in town. He had half of one if Massingham was away but not Ferrers, or if Ferrers was away but not Massingham.

It is needless to point out the contingency in which he might find himself without a home at all.

And, to complete the situation, the Ferrers-Massingham place belonged neither to Massingham nor to Ferrers, but to Massingham's sister, at present travelling in Spain—where the castles are.

A number of the members of the syndicate were to meet at Radleys'. Five or six men, gathered from as many different places, take some little time to assemble. Once assembled, they may take even longer to move off again. So, to have finished for the moment with this so-fascinating subject of homes, let us precede Kenneth and his friends to the flat of Miss Massingham, who had left her brother in charge, with a maid to look after him.

Half a mile away from Radleys' there rose a Pentonville-like block, or rather a system of blocks, built in bays about a gloomy courtyard, tiled and echoing. Concrete passages and iron balconies ran story above story round the interior of this well, the stairs to which also suggest a treadmill, arrested in its motion and cut up into convenient flights. There was, however, no need to climb. The Mansions had their hall-porter, their In-and-Out board on the ground floor, and a couple of lifts.

Miss Massingham's flat was on the fourth floor, half-way round the well and along a turning to the left. There was something spinsterish, something crochet-and-mittenish, about the very look of the outer door. Its glass upper panels showed lace half-curtains within, and its tiny brass knocker, no longer than a little finger, seemed to say, "Only two *tiny* little knocks, please!" The corridor was roofed, so that there was little need of a doormat and none of a scraper, but Miss Massingham's threshold had both, that mutely invited the boots to make their

toilet before entering. And with the opening of the door——

The careful gathering together of small objects, made for no purpose on earth but to be dusted and put back into their places again, began in the hall. On a chest, between two ebony elephants, the silver card-tray stood. The strip of mirror opposite was draped diagonally across one corner with an Indian shawl, and on a bracket by the side of it stood a small porcelain Virgin, with a rosary hanging beneath. Pushing at an inner door one entered the curio-shop itself. In that diminutive drawing-room Miss Massingham, though journeying far away in Spain, invisibly presided. One saw her, in smock and chamois gloves, running round picture-mouldings with a feather duster, polishing her silver, or rubbing bright the glass-topped tables with the medals and the fans and the filagree-ivory balls and the red and white chessmen within. Everything stood on its little mat, aligned to the thirty-second part of an inch—incense-burners, iridescent shells, eggshell china, the remainder of the herd of graduated ebony elephants. And when Miss Massingham had finished with her tiny drawing-room she might turn to the bedrooms. Of these there were two, one for herself and one for her maid. Her own had a large dolls'-house in it, that had remained with her since her childhood without a chair broken or a kitchen utensil out of its place. It seemed her own dwelling over again, microscopically little—or else her flat was the dolls'-house, not really very greatly enlarged.

But it was not easy for the one-armed Blythe to dust, even had he noticed that the place particularly needed dusting; and a good deal of dust had settled over all. It would have been even more difficult for Miss Massingham's maid to have dusted, for she was

no longer there. A maid for Massingham would have been a superfluity with Ferrers in need of the second bed. So Massingham had taken the maid's address and given her a holiday. Whether he had told his sister that he had done this he was never quite sure, and now he had gone and lost the maid's address. He remembered that he had been going to tell his sister all about it. But he wasn't much of a letter-writer, and it seemed a waste of time to write letters that followed people round from place to place. He would see to it that the place was thoroughly turned out before she returned.

So there, in the temporary absence of Massingham and Ferrers, Blythe found himself installed. He was not always quite easy in his mind about his tenancy. He had never in his life set eyes on this lady whose bed he occupied, whose bath he used, whose forks and spoons he put into his mouth. Sometimes, looking uneasily round at her belongings, he hoped it was all right. Massingham said it was quite all right. Yet he trusted, if ever she should take it into her head to walk in unannounced, that her brother would be there to introduce him. This was often on his mind as he lay in her bed, gazing across the room at the dolls'-house, and smoking cigarettes with an ash-tray by the side of her trough of devotional books—Thomas à Kempis, the Register of Martyrs, and a Metrical Version of the Psalms.

The tramping of feet was heard up the well, and a sound of voices and laughter. A key was put into the door, and half a dozen men, laden with various parcels, entered Miss Massingham's flat. Blythe came first. He switched on Miss Massingham's electric light and held open the door of Miss Massingham's drawing-room.

"Carefully, you chaps," he entreated them. "Ghastly lot of things about. Perhaps I'd better move a few of 'em——"

An object at a time—a bowl, a couple of silver-framed photographs, half a dozen little Japanese ivories—he began to clear Miss Massingham's marquetry table. "Better put a cloth or something on," he muttered. "No, not that," as somebody threw something rather terrifyingly embroidered across the room. "You know the kitchen, Chacey. See if there's anything there. And for God's sake mind those elephants, Craddock——"

It was a Dutch-treat party, to which each had contributed his portion. Craddock and Garstin had brought each a parcel wrapped up in thinnish brown paper, square in shape as to the greater part of it, and ending in a twisted wisp at the top. Garstin's parcel was done up in a glossier paper, with white string, which on being cut disclosed smaller tissue-papered packages. These on being opened showed sandwiches, a terrine of *foie gras*, a small keg of anchovies, and a Camembert cheese. Blythe himself had brought butter, a loaf, and two bottles of beer of the largest size procurable. Kenneth, in addition to the Mellins and the Glaxo and what remained of the scrounged cigars, put down a whole hundred Gold Flake box—which, as you are aware, does not, like the twenty-packets, display the one about the H's on the end.

Kenneth returned from the kitchen with a large white enamelled jug in his hand. As if he had not been out of the room, he resumed his conversation from the point where he had left off.

"I was telling you about this little professional. French, smart, larky, might have come from the gutter or anywhere, but knows her job——"

Somebody interrupted him.

"Oh, there are hundreds of instructresses about. The premises are our trouble. Who is this Harrowby woman of yours?"

Who, indeed, was she, that the syndicate should be concerned about her?

VI

WHERE MONEY IS

Her premises were not as big as Harrods' or the Birmingham Small Arms Factory. They consisted of no more than a tiny suite of rooms in South Molton Street. But many a mile of plate-glass frontage might have coveted the stream of Profits-without-Outlay that flowed into those rooms.

Let us take Kenneth's blackboard in Holborn as an illustration. There, as you sat in your stall, you were transported as if on a magic carpet to Goodwood and Ascot, Epsom or Doncaster or Kempton Park. You sat there with pencil and paper and vision did the rest. But from those premises in South Molton Street your liberated spirit took a wider sweep. The curtain went up, so to speak, on the centuries of England's story. Instead of racecourses you saw ivied Castles, Towers, Chases, Parks. Moors and salmon-rivers passed before your eyes, and craggy mountains with the inaccessible red deer. Most of us see these things only in the back pages of the *Times*. And in the inside pages of that journal we read that "England is changing hands."

Winifred Harrowby was assisting in the change. Divorced, and left to face the world with little but what she stood up in, she had procured herself a situation as a clerk in the office of an Estate Agent in Maddox Street. It had not taken her long to exchange her clerk's stool for a secretary's chair, but it was outside the office rather than in it that she kept those soft brown eyes of hers open and her wits busily at work. She possessed nothing. Her problem was to sell that nothing at the highest possible price.

She possessed nothing. She had neither houses to sell nor credit to enable her to sell them on anybody else's behalf. Estate Agency is a complicated business, and she had no intention whatever of sitting down for years to learn it.

Now here is a golden rule for the ignorant. When you cannot do a thing yourself you teach somebody else how to do it. When you have nothing else to sell them you sell your advice. She remembered the Herefordshire room that Rex Wyecastle had had copied and set up in London. With that in her mind she set herself to develop, to create, or at any rate to persuade others that she possessed, a little personal psychic gift.

If she had asked a guinea for her advice she would have remained a poor woman. She asked, first fifty, and then a hundred, and waxed fat. And she never made the mistake of trying to explain her gift.

"I haven't always got it," she would candidly confess. "It visits me. It comes and goes. I can't explain it. Yesterday, for example, I had to refuse a client because it had completely gone from me. . . . So buy The Towers by all means if you think it will satisfy what is deepest in your personality, but don't forget that sometimes our real

personalities are hidden most of all from ourselves. . . . No, I am not an Estate Agent. I am merely an occasional Consultant. (No, not a medium either: you don't understand.) I advise you, from my reading of you, which atmosphere you would be happy in and which you would not. Please give me something you are wearing—your handkerchief—any little thing—no, not a flower. Ah! . . . Shall I tell you what I get from you? Your personality has a rather remarkable wave-length. It is *not* that of The Towers. If you buy The Towers I already see you selling the place again in six months. Now the kind of house your aura suggests to me——"

Sometimes the aura suggested a Palladian environment, sometimes a new house altogether. Sometimes it was Georgian, sometimes Elizabethan, sometimes mediaeval. Actually, in a quiet way, she knew a good deal about names, pedigrees and family histories, and was acquiring more information still. Nothing so dashed her gift as to mention the name of Freud. Many people will talk Freud while repudiating that practitioner's name. No Jung nor Baudouin stood on the bookshelves in South Molton Street; she abhorred the name of psycho-analysis. Instead were Burke and Debrett, a Bradshaw in a red morocco case (for she was much away up and down the country), a sober-looking row of County Histories, a few works on Periods, Meyrick's "Arms and Armour," a large Heraldry, Cotman's "Sepulchral Brasses," and "Who's Who." "What's What" she already had at her finger-tips. A few slender volumes of vers-libres also lay about. Her consulting-room always had a faint odour of incense. Its dove-grey walls and soft carpeting of dove-grey were almost those of an ordinary drawing-room, a sort of neutral starting-point for the variously-hued auras

of her clients. So she brought the Latest Yet to bear upon the business of Estate Agency. Understand—not a gazing-crystal. Not a pentacle. Not a hieroglyph or a silver moon on black velvet anywhere. Abracadabra of that sort belonged to the Dark Ages. It has no place in this our enlightened time.

And why did she want Una Paull in her office? Well, first of all, she had to have somebody. Further, even to-day there still remain a few antiquated persons, narrow-minded about divorce and otherwise out of step with the times, who have a few hundreds or a few thousands left. Suppose some such fossilized Victorian should chance to find himself in that consulting-room on the South Molton Street first-floor. Suppose such an one should have heard a whisper of the Harrowby case. What could create a better impression than to find installed there a young and earnest and candid creature, irreproachably engaged to be married, and incidentally capable in minor ways of enlarging the firm's clientèle? Credit, no less than money, must be looked for where it is.

So much for the moment for Harrowbys', Consultants on Domestic Architecture and Decoration, 510 South Molton Street.

Miss Massingham's guests were now well into their meal. A red-and-white cloth, with the words "Glass Cloth" woven into its border, covered her marquetry table, and the large bedroom jug of Roman punch, fortified with Mellins and stiffened with Glaxo, stood conveniently on the floor, with an evening paper interposed between it and the carpet. Bread and butter were on the seat of a wheatear chair, and the long ash of a half-smoked cigarette drooped unnoticed like a grey catkin over the edge of the mantelpiece.

A table-knife stood upright in the *foie-gras*, and one of Miss Massingham's punch-ladles was being put to its proper purpose. They were not turning the place into a bear-garden. They were busily eating, quietly and seriously talking. Let us lose a moment in memorizing their little group as they sat, surrounded by the ebony elephants and filagree silver, with Thomas à Kempis and the Psalms in the next room.

If we know Kenneth we know a little of all of them. They were just an average set of fellows, perhaps a little wise before their time in some things, but otherwise neither better nor worse than anybody else. They could have been picked up by the score in any reputable street; they did not wait to be picked up, but came in their tens of thousands, when they were wanted. But that was over. They were sharp-witted up to a point because they had to be. Their ties, no longer regimental, were perfectly knotted and their spats carefully brushed for much the same reason. Their faces resembled Kenneth's in this, that, though seen in repose, they were capable of a brightness that positively startled one, so instantaneously could it be assumed.

And five at least out of the six were, to use their own phrase, ready to do anything, ready to go anywhere.

Yet there was a certain unoriginality about the appeals they occasionally made in the Personal Columns of the newspapers. Had all the Golf Club Secretaryships existed for which they sighed, England would have been one vast links. Similarly it would have been one huge poultry-farm had that so strangely-attractive career furnished all the opportunities they sought. There, for example, was Crafter, just " axed " from a war-ministry, with the marks of gas scorching still on his face; he was doing

nothing whatever at present, and would gladly have bred poultry, white mice or stickle-backs for three meals a day. There was Craddock, the sallow engineer, who did small mysterious things with men who travelled between London and Cologne, once in a while journeying there himself, and for ever bringing out of his pockets pen-knives, jewellery, gadgets for the office desk, or wads of paper marks. There was Garstin, who, like Blythe, was much in attendance on a lady whose middle years had found her suddenly and preposterously rich. There was Humby (M.G.C.), who apparently lived by introducing one man to another. All were good organizers—whatever that may mean. All knew a certain amount about cars, Military Law, the Calcutta Sweep, Mellins, Glaxo, and the pari-mutual. All habitually backed the selections of sporting-journalists, and played a guaranteed game of bridge or poker.

And there was not one of them who had not a perfectly genuine desire to earn his living as honestly as he was allowed to.

You look surprised? That (you say) might surely be taken for granted? Very well, have it so. But do not let us make out life to be too unvaryingly kind to untrained, unqualified, sometimes unemployable young men, who touched their crest at eighteen and have sagged in the trough ever since. If the little party gathered in Miss Massingham's flat still kept their heads above water, they knew those who had not done so. Indeed, if it was a question of sinking or swimming, the heads of their fellows bobbed in the flood all about them. All about them there rose to the surface the bubbles that told them that somebody drowned. You and I, sitting in the lounge at Radleys' with waiters to fetch and carry for us, know less about these things than the young

men who see them from the other end of the dispense. We, emphatically, want no more war. We want things to settle down again. We want rents to be decontrolled, or to remain controlled, as the case may be. We want the exchanges stabilized, half-a-crown off the income-tax, this leader in power, that dismissed. But what about them? What are they thinking about it all? We ask them, and they disconcert us with a smile that tells us nothing at all. Not an inkling of their inner thoughts do we get; they are inscrutable in our midst. Perhaps they think as we do. Perhaps, on the other hand, and curiously absent-mindedly, they go back to those homes of theirs and take up a book. You would never guess what book. It is His Majesty's Pay Warrant. Much brooding and cogitation take place over that book. Its orange covers hold the ashes of all sorts of Might-have-Beens. Because these young men did not know the ropes, and nobody told them exactly what they were entitled to, they missed all manner of Allowances. They may not want war, but oh, they would dearly love a second cut-in at the Army Pay Office! Kenneth estimated that on his account alone, for special duty and what not, the Treasury had benefited to something like the extent of a hundred pounds. As for Blythe, with the engaging smile and the empty sleeve, he intended to get a little nearer to headquarters next time. Or else to go into Munitions——

And that was as much as you ever got out of them.

But need we, you and I, take it as all in the course of nature that a hard-up, hard-pressed young man, provided he sees a safe way of doing it, will inevitably *not* put money on a horse after he knows the result of the race? Must we be quite so definitely sure that, whatever else happens, he will *not* traffic in a high-

priced but illicit commodity if the temptation comes his way and he cares to run the risk? Or must we assume that, struck with a sudden passion for sport, travel, scientific research, or whatever else the camouflage may be, he will *not* go off rum-running into a country that does not desire the same? We might at least first ascertain the facts. Those fellow-strugglers in the water, those tell-tale bubbles (*spurlos versenkt!*) are better seen by the swimmer alongside than by us. What, quite lately for example, was the inner history of that interesting little show-up about a Matrimonial Agency? There is no reason why a Matrimonial Agency should not be a comparatively reputable undertaking, but—Kenneth remembered the bubbles, could have told you the names of the men now in clink, and knew exactly why they had been put there. Or what of Blythe's job, or of Garstin's? To be bear-ward to a wealthy lady is an honest enough job in itself, but—suppose Blythe had not had his disability money, or both of them their scruples? These things are not very far from the border-line. Money must be had; it is where it is; and it is no good looking for it elsewhere. But let us not be disproportionate. On the whole things might be very, very much worse. For one who goes under a hundred struggle on, not always unsuccessfully. But, helped by discordant elements, and barring always the straightforwardness of the fellows themselves, there is in our midst, and the more secretly that it is open for all to see, the making of something new and strange and still invisible, that we will take leave to call crime.

Therefore what they were doing among Miss Massingham's bric-à-brac that evening was not in the least what that lady might have feared. It was rather more serious. They were not primarily

patterning her table with the rings of glasses and making her curtains smell of Rex Wyecastle's cigars. They were merely trying to make ends meet while keeping their heads above the level where all manner of undesirable things begin.

For their dancing club, if ever they got it started, was going to be strictly and conventionally proper. No suspect cellars in Lower Regent Street or in the back-streets of Tottenham Court Road for them! Registered they would have to be, but not raided if they could help it. That was why Kenneth so ardently wanted his uncle's place; solid, sober respectability also must be looked for where it is. For his own sake he would have seen to it that there should be no complaints from neighbours, nothing to move for an injunction about. He sighed regretfully, while Blythe, whose eyes were everywhere, fidgeted and implored him to be careful where he dropped his cigarette-ash.

"It isn't just the dancing-room; the whole house is simply made for it," he sighed. "We could have thrown the dining and drawing-rooms into one for a supper-room—large bedroom on the first floor for the ladies' cloak-room—American Bar at the end of the passage"—he looked wistfully back on the denied opportunity. "We always did have parties there. You knew my brothers, didn't you, Crafter?"

"I knew Claude and Ronnie. I didn't know Toby."

"And we could have parked the cars in the Square—well, it's no good thinking about it. Give that jug a fair wind, somebody. I'll try to get hold of the Harrowby to-morrow. Bung-ho, you chaps——"

"Bung-ho, Miss Massingham." The words secretly shaped themselves in Blythe's anxious breast.

" What about a spot of poker? "

" Bear a hand to clear away then——"

They cleared away what was left of the solid portion of their repast, but kept the jug of punch and the bottles of beer. The red-and-white cloth remained on the table because of the glasses. The cards were dealt, and in silence they settled to their play. It was a nice little cut-throat game of Dog Rotten, and however the scoring-sheet stood at the end of it, or whoever won a shilling or lost half-a-crown, it was but a transference from one of the syndicate's pockets to another. For it was not among themselves that the money lay.

VII

SOUTH MOLTON STREET

In leaving Una Paull in charge of the premises in South Molton Street Winifred Harrowby had done so in the following words:

" I expect I shall be back on Friday afternoon. Simply tell them you've only just come, and next week we'll go thoroughly into the whole thing. Be charming to everybody. Have that nice Sutherland girl in to see you if you like, and what's-her-name, her friend. Be looking through the books. And I'd keep my hair just like that. Now I must rush. Good-bye, darling, I leave everything to you——"

Now, after nearly a week of this sole responsibility, Una wondered who the " everybody " was she must

be nice to, and what the " everything " was that had been left so entirely in her hands.

It had seemed rather important the way Winnie had said it. Things did seem important when Winnie said them. She had imagined quite a lot of telephoning, booking of appointments (for which purpose Winnie had left her little vellum-bound book behind), cars waiting in the street below, people waiting in the outer room. Actually she found nothing whatever to do. The books Winnie had said she might be studying were not the books of the firm's accounts. These were kept locked up in the safe in the wall. They were books on Orders, Periods, Styles, and so on, and she thought Winnie more wonderful than ever if she carried all that in her head. It just showed that women were every bit as capable in business as men. Except for Rex, who had twice called to take her out to lunch, not a soul had been near the place. But probably Winnie had arranged it so until the new secretary should be able to take up the threads. Things were to be properly gone into on her return. In the meantime Una desperately wished she had somebody to talk to.

Who in particular she wanted to talk to, oddly enough she could not have told. There was Winnie herself, of course, but soon there would be Winnie all day long. She and Winnie would have millions of things to discuss presently, so it wasn't Winnie. And it wasn't Rex. She supposed she would spend the rest of her life talking to Rex, so there was no hurry about that either. In fact she couldn't think of anybody, unless it were one of her old school-friends—say Mollie Sutherland or Philippa Hyde.

And she was no more sure what it was she wanted to talk to Mollie and Philippa about. She had

written to them about her engagement, she had written to them about her going into business, and had had long letters back from both of them. She supposed she could have talked about both business and engagement for a whole day on end, but somehow it wasn't that either. On the very point of stepping out into Life she had a wistful longing to go back again, if only for an hour. She wanted to talk to somebody she knew about the things she did not know. She wanted one of the comfortable old talks, all about everything and nothing, before things had got quite so startlingly definite. Her career, for example, now seemed to be definitely settled, but she wanted to talk about those dream-careers, before she had heard of this place in South Molton Street at all. Her engagement was quite definite, but she wanted to talk about those guess-lovers of a year or two ago, never met, not of the earth at all, but exchangeable, hers for Philippa's, Philippa's for Mollie's, with a complexion added here or a quality subtracted there, just what she fancied for the moment, variable at her sweet pleasure throughout the whole of a summer's afternoon. That, more or less, was what she wanted. She wondered whether Philippa and Mollie were wanting it at that moment too. They and she had left the Royal School on the same day, but it was difficult to think of them as not still there. But Mollie was at the Royal Free Hospital, learning to be a doctor, and Philippa was going to be a sculptor in a Chelsea studio. Leggy, pigtailed girls whom Una didn't know filled the dormitories and class-rooms that Mollie and Philippa and she had left irretrievably behind them. And in a few more terms they too would be set free, another freshet of contemporaries, to trickle in their appointed rills, to be drawn up by the sun, to soak into the ground, and

to find the pond or the river or the sea as best they could.

The pavements outside were sunny, and, lightly as her memories, almost imperceptible shadows of taxis and vans and of people passing flitted moment by moment across the ceiling of the room. It occurred to her that she ought to be doing something even though there seemed little to do. She moved away from the window to the table, where lay the books she had been told to read.

How was she to know that those large, richly-bound volumes—the Cotman, the Meyrick, the Genealogies, the County Histories—meant very nearly nothing at all? How was she to know that, where Winifred Harrowby went, there her mysterious business went with her? She stood looking at the large tome on Sepulchral Brasses, absently turning her engagement-ring on her finger. In the little vellum-bound appointments-book that Winnie had left behind her she had come across the names of several Baronets and their Ladies—there were even a couple of Lords—so she supposed the Book of Brasses had something to do with that. And Una had one idea that she was almost bursting to tell Winnie. She had read all about this Honours Scandal in the *Times*, and she quite agreed with the writer of the articles. It ought to be stopped. The idea, making these dreadful people Knights and Baronets just because they had a lot of money! So Una had thought the matter carefully out. It all came of people wanting something a little bit above them. And because those at the bottom were just as bad as those at the top in this respect, she would start at the bottom. She would have had everybody called (say) John Smith, without a Mister or anything. Then, if a person already called himself Esquire, and

could show that he really had waited on a Knight, she would have allowed him to be a Mister. All Knights, unless they had been knighted on the field of battle in France or Palestine or somewhere, and most of the Baronets as well, would then be Esquires. The few remaining Baronets would be Knights, and the Barons the same, and so on up the scale, bringing everybody a step or two steps down, and leaving lots of room at the top for the King and Captain Holbrook and nice people like that. She looked at the Book of Brasses again, with its pictures of Beauchamps and Stapletons and De Veres, all with their hands piously placed together and their feet on little dogs. Once, at Winnie's house in Sussex Square, she had met one of the firm's clients, Lady Howmuch, of Ware. And she remembered what Rex had said about thinking gently of people. So she tried to think gently of Lady Howmuch too. Even families, when you came to think of it, had to begin somewhere. The Beauchamps and Howards had had to begin somewhere. She had heard that some of them were the descendants of Kings' mistresses. It might be wrong for Kings to have mistresses, but Kings were sometimes in rather a difficult position. They might have to marry a stuffy sort of Queen for political reasons, like alliances and things. So they were different. And as they were supposed to have the pick of everything, their mistresses might at least be expected to be beautiful to look at. But Lady Howmuch was not beautiful to look at, and Una couldn't imagine her being anybody's mistress. Perhaps people got nicer as time went on. Perhaps they had a different look when they were carved or drawn or engraved. Perhaps, centuries hence, carved in marble or incised in brass, with her fat feet on a

little dog, Lady Howmuch would have a different look. In that case her chauffeur, who really did look like a picture of a Knight, would have to be carved not quite so distinguished-looking and stern. It would never do for everybody to look alike.

She continued to turn the ring on her finger as she thought of all these important things.

Lastly, the ring reminded her that if it hadn't been for her engagement to Rex she would not have been in South Molton Street at all. For Winnie had offered her the job the moment she had heard of her engagement.

"If you're going to be married you must have your own money," she had said with decision. "No girl ought to have to ask a man for every penny she spends. It's degrading to be tied to a man just because he pays the bills. Now I've a plan I've been thinking of for some little time——"

And forthwith she had offered to take her into the business.

She knew that Rex didn't like the idea of the business, but he had been very nice about it, and she was grateful to him.

She continued to stand at the table's edge, looking down on the Book of Brasses, ever turning her ring idly.

Kenneth Chacey started up the car, swung round past the white steps and shrubs of the Hôtel Maeterlinck, and headed west. It was a gay mid-morning, and seldom had the town been fuller of music. As he sped past the Natural History Museum a full band was playing—a piano on a donkey-cart, whistle and cornet and cigar-box fiddle all complete. Evidently capital had been sunk in that enterprise. The car went quickly, and the strains were lost in a

few seconds, but others succeeded them almost immediately—the strumming of a barrel-organ that played " My Coal Black Mammy " at the corner of the street leading to South Kensington Station. Farther on, opposite the Victoria and Albert, two men sang, dragging their feet as they went. And the Brompton Road, both on Harrods' side and on the high pavement opposite, was a very fair for gaiety. Rows of men—ex-volunteers, ex-conscripts, lads not yet ex-anything—men with chins shaved with army-razors, men with chins not shaved at all—drilled men, men who knew less about drill than Kenneth's boots knew—men of twenty, men of seventy, with limbs, without, with placards on their breasts, with none—heroes and humbugs, honest men and rogues, professional whiners and men with broken hearts, each stood in his place in the row. They had trinkets in their trays. Little wooden dolls danced on the pavement when the bulb was pressed—even as so many of the men themselves had danced at the pressing of that more gigantic bulb, the good and wise control of which is the most anxious endeavour of every honest man alive.

At the corner of Montpelier Street a Punch-and-Judy squeaked.

Near the garden-seat shops an ocarina contended with a penny whistle.

Where the Brompton Road joins Knightsbridge there returned to barracks a swinging khaki column, headed by a full regimental band, with a hundred grown lads bringing up the rear.

Full of music—one could travel for miles and not be out of earshot of it——

But Kenneth noticed little of it all. Long ago he had learned that if one bothered one's head about these things one only bothered it in vain. It was at

least decent weather to be rattling a box in. He had his own affairs to think of, and was bending his mind to them.

He was never quite sure whether he liked Winifred Harrowby or not. He did not forget how, long ago, she had tried to pull his leg about her divorce. She had referred to it as her " sad story," whereupon he had looked at her, and had then asked her, perfectly politely, whether she was getting at him. Her " sad story "! Kenneth had had to laugh. All at once he had remembered the account of that sad story in the *News of the World*. That lively paper had done her rather well, and a whole column, all about somebody you have known for years, can go a long way towards beguiling the tedium of a dullish spell in the trenches. As if anybody turned a hair about a mere divorce, at this time of day! Divorce wasn't like smallpox. It didn't leave a mark. Any woman he passed in the street might be divorced for all he knew, or cared. Did she think he was Rex, or who? Anyway she had been quick enough to take the hint, and hadn't tried it on a second time. And speaking of Rex, Kenneth's private opinion was that his uncle would have done better not to meddle in that case at all. In Kenneth's humble opinion she wasn't the kind of woman to make an enemy of.

It was quieter in Park Lane and Deanery Street than in the Brompton Road, but in Oxford Street the music broke out again. Then, not far from Bond Street Tube Station, he was held up by a block. From his low seat he could see little but vehicles, creeping forward an inch at a time, and the skyline of the buildings opposite. And close at hand a girl, neatly dressed in grey, was drawing with chalks on the pavement.

She was bareheaded and quite good-looking, and

Kenneth noticed that the soft grey felt hat at her knee was nearly a third full of copper coins. At another time Kenneth might have felt something like indignation that a woman should be brought down to this, but now a certain disturbing humour in it suddenly struck him. He was seized by just such another whimsical fit as had caused him to drill the row of boots in his bedroom at the Maeterlinck Hotel —"Boots—'*shun!*" It occurred to him that the girl, her chalks, the coppers in her hat, were somehow not to be taken quite seriously.

But how they did manage to dig themselves in, these women! If there were two jobs still unassailed by them, still the high privilege of man, the maker and destroyer, he would have thought that those two jobs were pavement-drawing and sweeping a crossing. But here was enterprise for you! Women had bagged one of these now! Kenneth actually shook with laughing. He wanted to take his hat off to her, to cheer her on her chosen career. For what did it matter to Kenneth? He had finished with these fool questions of jobs and men's rights and women's rights and all the rest of it. Probably she had been an art-student, and was therefore at her proper job. He couldn't see what she had drawn. Earl Beattie, very likely, or the Battle of Jutland. Anyway he hoped it paid her. She had quite a nice pair of shoes on. He wondered whether she was married.

A lurching movement took the mass of vehicles. Wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes he lifted his bowler hat and threw the girl a shilling. He was still laughing when, three minutes later, he drew up in South Molton Street.

He had never been to the place before, and his eyes scanned the frontage. But he did not see the

girl who saw him from the first-floor window, and then fell back with her hand to her face as if she had received a blow. He mounted the stairs, knocked at a door, and waited. Receiving no reply, he knocked again, and then without further ado walked in.

He stood in an outer room that opened into an inner one. The door between the two rooms stood open. Across the threshold of it they looked at one another, still as two stones—Kenneth Chacey and Una Paull.

VIII

SOMEONE TO TALK TO

They had been bound to meet some time, but it seemed just like life that they should meet after this fashion, he with the jest of the woman pavement-artist still upon him, she wishing that the floor would open and let her through. He looked at her. Obviously she was installed here—more female labour launched on the world to discover what it was really made of. But among the things Kenneth Chacey had learned since the days of the Vision was never to be surprised at anything—that, and to see the funny side of things when you could. There is nothing like having been through a war for bringing out the subtler humours of peace.

Indeed he almost laughed in the middle of his very first sentence. To come upon her like this, not five

minutes after the joke of the pavement-artist, put seriousness out of the question. There was nothing to do but to play up to the whole ironical situation. He could only look straight at her, try to control his twitching mouth, and say, "Oh, it's you! I came to see Mrs. Harrowby."

Afterwards, when the mirthful fit was past, he could not remember whether she answered in words or not. Somehow he gathered that Mrs. Harrowby was not there.

"Is she going to be in soon?"

By the same means of communication he had a "No."

"Not to-day?"

She did not even shake her head. She seemed a little frightened of him.

"When will she be back?"

This she answered in one faint word—"Friday."

"That's a nuisance."

Her eyes were taking in every detail of his face. He did not seem the same person. He seemed somehow the same and yet not the same—the same more or less in appearance, but as if somebody she didn't know looked out of his eyes. Those eyes had formerly been shy, a little troubled sometimes, not very often lifted directly to hers. He had had a way of sitting leaning forward by her side, on a low seat or a staircase perhaps, not saying very much, but somehow brooding, melting as it were towards her, making his presence felt. When he had talked it had been about the things he hoped to do. He had wanted to live an outdoor life in the country, to take up Forestry, live in Herefordshire village, push about the district on a motor-bike, be alert, active, useful. And he had been alert and active and useful then. Though he had not looked much at her she had often

stolen glances at him behind his back—that straight, drilled back with the nice steep-shaped head on it. He had looked so young to wear a Major's crown on his shoulder and that gay little spectrum of ribbons on his breast. Now, in spite of the care with which his hat was brushed and his knitted tie knotted, he had the appearance of an unlooked-after man. To look at him was no longer to think of woods and hills and streams and nice things. His shyness too had gone. Something hard and bright and immediate danced in his eyes, and set the corners of his mouth twitching. He swaggered, made her uneasy and uncomfortable. She wished he would go.

But he showed no signs of going. He was still standing in the doorway, looking with curiosity at the dry-points on the grey walls, the Chinese jar on the Adam mantelpiece, the mahogany rack that held the folios of prints, the large books wide open on the table. And suddenly he asked if he might come in, and did so without waiting for an answer. He walked to the window and gave a glance down at the car. Then he turned to her again, and, though his back was to the light, she felt that too-ready smile.

"Odd our butting into one another like this, isn't it?" he said.

She made no reply.

"And by the way, I hear I've got to congratulate you."

Oh (she cried within herself), why wouldn't he go?

"You knew he was my uncle?"

"Yes—no—I didn't at first—then I did," she answered faintly. Her engagement was the last thing she wanted to discuss with him.

"Well, the best of luck and all that," he remarked casually.

Then he noticed that she had taken a little vellum-bound book into her hand. She was asking him whether she should make an appointment for him. He looked at her from head to toe.

"What on earth are you doing here?" he asked her bluntly. "Do you mean to say you've got a job here?"

"Yes."

"And Rex let you?"

She broke suddenly out. "Oh, I *wish* you'd please go!"

But he was looking round the room again, and once more that restless mirth possessed him. There must be money in this consulting business, by Jove! An expensive place like this, as well as the house in Sussex Square! Good for Winifred! There you were—women again! All sex, and not having any scruples to speak of—driving up in their Rolls-Royces to take a poor girl's job from her for an extra quid a week pocket-money or else just to be in the swim! Doing things a man would be turfed out of a club for and then bringing out their prettiest handkerchief and crying! They got away with everything, from the jobs in banks and offices to drawing Battles of Jutland on the flagstones and having swagger premises in South Molton Street. If Kenneth ever had to have a partner he wouldn't choose a man. He would choose a woman and have it both ways, the same as they seemed to do.

"Please do go," Una Paull said again. If he didn't go she felt that she must, and leave him there.

He shrugged his shoulders. "At any rate you can't say I haven't kept out of your way," he said offhandedly.

"I don't know what you mean."

But she knew very well what he meant. That

episode of the Armistice Night loomed bright and dividing between them in that first-floor dove-grey room. She had longed to forget it. She hated herself when she remembered the nights she had cried over it. But he seemed to think it was something to be carried off with a strut and his head in the air. She knew the kind of creatures he had been with, but knew it as it were out of a book; actually to have seen their backs and arms, to have heard their laughter, to have felt their storm of scent in her nostrils, had both frightened and fascinated her. She had felt suddenly experienced, conscious of a dismaying addition to her knowledge. So *that* was what men were, even those who seemed so quiet and shy that they were afraid to even touch a girl's hand! She supposed he would have gone on throwing dust in her eyes if she hadn't happened to catch him out! And the thought emboldened her. If he was going to swagger she was going to stand her ground. Rex at any rate was grave and gentle. Rex didn't even kiss her when she showed him plainly that she didn't want to be kissed. Somehow Rex never made her feel that she was alone in the room with a man, and as a matter of fact she was a little—well, a little off all that. She supposed she couldn't alter her sex, but there were ever so many things in the world besides sex. And all at once she was not a bit afraid of him. She faced him, with the little vellum-bound volume in her hand.

"Shall I book you an appointment or shall I not?" she said, looking straight at him.

"Eh? Oh, yes. I do rather want to see her."

"Saturday morning?" She was business-like now, and consciously so.

"Do nicely."

"Eleven o'clock?" The pencil was poised.

"Shall you be here?"

"Oh, no!" she answered quickly.

"Then that's all right. I have kept away, you know," he swaggered again.

Suddenly she could stand his manner no longer. She spoke in a new voice, disdainfully, resenting everything about him, and above all that apparently he should think her a fool not to see through him.

"Anyway I'd stop pretending if I were you!" she flung at him. "And you needn't look like that either!" she added angrily.

For he was smiling at her, critically and dispassionately, for all the world as if she had been, not an individual person, different from any other person alive, but a sort of type. And the fit of sardonic humour started by the woman pavement-artist took him again. He knew this new type. The streets, the buses, the Tubes, were full of girls like her, with their cold defensive stares, as if a fellow mustn't even look at them. He had noticed that a certain class of young men no longer offered these young women a seat; he had had his own offer of a seat chillingly declined. And Kenneth didn't know that he altogether blamed the young men. Bounders some of them might be, parading their silver badges and wearing their ribbons with mufti and what-not, but they honestly believed that these girls had bagged their jobs by virtue of something they put on with a powder-puff or a lipstick, and they resented it. And Kenneth, idling away his days and weeks, with no theories about anything but enough and to spare of the trifling observations on which theories are founded when you have scraped together enough of them, often amused himself by wondering how these emancipated young women were going to turn out at the end of it all. Pretty insufferably he sometimes

thought, with all their chat about the terms on which they would get married, their stipulations, their reservations, their eyes that looked straight past a fellow as if he wasn't there, their nervous lip-moistening mouths, their overdone consciousness and physical coldness. Give him something that was at least itself, neither feminist nor the other thing. Par-par at the Maeterlinck, Dot in the underground place in Piccadilly, any decent pretty girl in a tobacco-shop, his uncle's dancing-mistress. These he could get on with. They might not be the Vision exactly, but he had finished with Visions. One lived and learned. Did not one?

He had turned. "What's that you were saying about pretending?" he suddenly asked her.

"I've rather a lot of work to do," coldly replied the girl who had been longing for somebody to talk to.

"Then you're lucky. Though personally I hate work. But that's one thing you can put right out of your head—that I pretend. It's the one thing I don't do."

"Mightn't it sometimes be better if you did?" she asked freezingly.

"There may be something in that," he answered lightly.

Who would have guessed that there lay buried between these two the beginnings of a beautiful thing, choked almost in the hour of its birth? Who would have supposed that he had ever stolen those looks at her, before which her lids had dropped and her colour had deliciously changed? Who would have dreamed that, with a hundred sweet unspoken meanings, he had talked about that Forestry job, and what the pay would be, and all about Herefordshire, where they still peeled the oaks in the Spring, and

the chopping of the axe rang further up the wood, and the sound of the saw was heard, and the rush of the falling tree? Who, to look at them now, at him who had cut a Vision out of his life, at her engaged to be married to somebody else, would have guessed it?

Anybody would—anybody with eyes in his head!

For, with his appointment made, why did he linger? And why did she, with her young shoulders and obstinate nape turned to him again, in her heart of hearts not want him to go away? He stayed to show that he could stay, to boast of his immunity in his own eyes. And she, who would have died rather than say a word he might suppose was meant to keep him, was back at the beginning of all her dreaming again. Oh, not dreams of him as she saw him now, perhaps not dreams of him as she had ever seen him! It was the dream of a dream that held her. It was that brief backward look into her own breast of which Mollie Sutherland had been a part, and Philippa Hyde had been a part, and their careers had been a part, and all they had not doubted of doing in the future had been a part, and that love had been a part, so lovely before it comes, so heart-rendingly lovely when it has gone, but so taken for granted in the short moment of its enduring. Unexpressed, but chokingly felt, all this lay tremulously behind. And had she dared to tell the truth, it would have been that nobody was farther from her deepest heart at that moment than the man she had pledged herself to marry.

But he wasn't going to be told that he pretended. As if she had reminded him of every detail of that incident of the Armistice Night, he took her swiftly up.

"At any rate I saved you one thing. You'd have

had to cut me. So I saved you the trouble and cut you instead."

"Then you did pretend—you pretended not to see me!"

"Oh, that! But not in anything else. I may be a waster, but I'm hanged if I'm a cad. I don't take people out and then give them the shake if somebody else happens to see me!"

Had she been older, had she at least seen that there was a certain crooked sort of loyalty in it, all might have been different. Had she been able to break through that shallow crust of his bravado—had she realized how many of life's dreadful things he had been fated to see and how few of its fair ones—had there been anyone to tell her that life had been joyous once and would be joyous again, but that he lived in the joyless between—could all this have been, she might have looked on him with gentler eyes. But when have the young known these things? When, as if life were endless, have they foregone the immediate retort? She saw the backs and arms of his companions of that Armistice Night again, heard their laughter, smelt their scent, and the words came, thenceforward not to be recalled.

"What a splendid nature to have!"

His momentary sincerity vanished as if by magic. Instantly his face became all smiles. Stand that? He? Not if he knew it! For years his life had been anybody's, but now it was his own again, to do what he liked with. He showed no more forbearance than she. With that bright habitual gaiety he derided himself, her, the world and everybody in it.

"Think so? Then that's all right. All the best people do. Mark of a little gentleman. Can't stand your snobs. It cost me rather a lot that night, but it would have been just the same if it had been in a

coffee-stall. Honour it would. Mustn't let pals down. Not done. Now I must push along. Thanks for fixing up for Saturday. How is Mrs. Harrowby, by the way? "

Without waiting for her reply he took his hat and stalked out.

She lifted her eyes in time to see his straight back disappear. She saw that pleasant shape of the back of his head. But she did not call him back. Instead she looked round this room where there was nothing whatever to do. It did not now seem a place of adventure, her taking-off place for the world. It was just a dreary, scented waiting-room, where she did not even know what she was waiting for. She wished the years would pass. Then this wretched time they called youth would be over, and she supposed she would be married to Rex, and perhaps have children. She didn't care if her hair did go white. Old age couldn't be worse than this.

Oh, why couldn't he have remained as he had been, when he had sat on the stairs with her, said those sweet shy things about his prospects, and—she was perfectly certain—had told her in all but words that he loved her?

Not that she loved him now. She hated him now.

Suddenly she sank into a chair, put her hands, one with a ring on it, over her face, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

PART II

I

ORGANIZATION

THE trouble with those who labour to help these lads of the village of ours is that they plan for them, not what they want, but what they consider to be good for them. No doubt this is just as it should be, for give people what they want and they immediately want something else. Nevertheless, machines, whether of Organization or what-not, are only machines, whereas men remain men, infinitely various, wilful, individual. You may prevent them from doing as they please, but ultimately you cannot make them do as *you* please. Between the handle you turn and the ciphers with which you feed it, there emerges from your averaging-machine an entirely new product. It isn't what anybody wanted. When you've got it you don't know what to do with it. But apparently it must be so. You tell me, for example, that I should do well to emigrate. It would be better for me, better for the land I leave, better for that I go to. But I reply that I do not wish to emigrate. And I do not emigrate. In the end I remain an outcast here, while the welcome for which I have no use is wasted in Canada, Australia or British East.

It happened one morning that Rex Wyecastle had just left a Conference on this very subject. He had returned to his own office and had taken up his station on the hearthrug. He had not spoken at the meeting he had just left. Instead he had listened, with a curious newness of experience, to those who had. He could not make out even yet what had given the occasion its appearance of novelty. It had been much like a hundred other meetings he had attended. Speaker after speaker had set up, as it were, the Ideal Emigrant—a brown-faced fellow with a bundle, a smiling mouth, a look of hope in his eyes, and a sort of invisible umbilical cord, so many thousand miles long, that should ensure his return the moment his country wanted him again.

And then, quite suddenly, had come the novelty. In the place of this pleasant and convenient figure he had all at once found himself putting the image of—his nephew Kenneth.

He had never ascertained Kenneth's views on this particular subject. He rather doubted whether they would necessarily be what it would have been so useful to have had them. But there was not a doubt that emigration would have been the very thing for him. Rex remembered the prophecies of not very many years ago. They had all fitted in beautifully together. After that large, open-air life, would men ever return to their office-stools and shop-counters? No! Having once known the abounding health that comes of habits of physical discipline, would they ever settle down into slackness again? No! Would they, after the haunting, almost anguishing sweetness of reveille at five of a midsummer morning, consent to be awakened by a lodging-house alarum-clock? Would they remain rooted in one spot after the wild free spaces of Mesopotamia and Palestine? No, no,

no! The sea and the ranch and the farm for them, the spade and the dynamite-stick and the plough! They would want to bridge rivers, to drive new ways through the wilderness, to fell forests, to establish new towns! They would want to sleep under the stars, to breathe the untainted air, to turn their very crust and water into manna and wine with this new revelation of the boundless possibilities of Life.

All of which naturally pointed to emigration, for one cannot do these things in Brixton or Kensington or Leeds.

Yet Rex hesitated, newly doubting. Something, he didn't know what, was not quite right about it. On paper he didn't see a single point in which it could be improved. Show him that point and it should have his instant attention. The legitimate claims and functions of every Department concerned had been exhaustively considered. The Crown Agents were now unanimous, the Treasury benign, the Cabinet anxious to have the matter settled. The hungry ships, whose meals were the carrying of men, were ready to take them to any corner of the world. Of all his colleagues, Rex believed himself to be the only one into whose mind there had crept as much as the shadow of a doubt. Only lately he had been as confident as they. What had happened?

It seemed to have begun with certain personal papers he had been looking into. These were the papers that had to do with Kenneth's interest in the Kensington house. As Rex had thought, that interest was almost exhausted. Rather less than fifty pounds was due to Kenneth on the settlement, and that he might have whenever he pleased. Rex had, as a matter of fact, asked him if he could make it convenient to look in that very day.

But once more he had felt compunction at being

rid of his nephew in this summary fashion. Oh, he knew all that could be urged against Kenneth. No more than anybody else could Kenneth have his cake and eat it. Sooner or later he would have to stand alone, and it was not kindness, but the exact opposite, to prop him beyond a certain point. He must learn by his mistakes, which he would never do if he was allowed to evade the consequences of them. He could not go on having fifty after fifty, indefinitely and for ever. Then there were Rex's own ideas of right and wrong to consider. There was his cousin Maurice to consider, not to mention old Mrs. Wyecastle. Kenneth never seemed to consider anybody but himself. Rex was intimately familiar with all these things, and the more he looked at them the more desirable did emigration for Kenneth appear. And say his nephew could be brought to look at it in a proper light. In that case the sum needn't be limited to fifty pounds at all. Rex was none too well-off, and would be adding to his own responsibilities presently, but he had thought of two hundred and fifty as a not impossible figure.

But there would have to be a clear understanding that Kenneth took himself in hand. Weighty and Imperial things could not be jeopardized on his account, and two hundred and fifty pounds thrown into the sea as well.

But as Rex stood there by the mantelpiece, striped-trousered and black-jacketed, the brow under his fine weaving of hair knitted in thought, he had a third anxiety on the top of all. This was lest he should be getting past his work. There were times when he felt defeated by the mere complexity of life. His task was to do the best he could for everybody—as much good as possible, as little harm; and if the outcome was a misfit he no longer knew what to do

about it. He did not think he had ever failed in his duty as far as he had been granted light to see it. None but he knew what it had cost him when, towards the middle of the war, he had been pressingly persuaded to exchange his khaki for this jacket and trousers. He would have preferred to remain in khaki, one of ten thousand older men than he, who had filled the recruiting-offices and the record-offices, the trade-testing centres, the military tribunal posts, the countless offices of one sort and another. He looked well in khaki, knew that he looked well in it. He often felt that the mere wearing of it made him younger. But he also knew that he had no mean gift for the details and even for the principles of administration, and in view of an opportunity for plain unspectacular usefulness he had not hesitated. Why masquerade, an elderly encumbrance in uniform, who had never sloped a rifle, never thrown a Mills, and never worn a gas-mask in his life?

But all this only added to this new dread, that he might be falling behind his colleagues in organizing-efficiency.

The door opened, and he looked expectantly up. But it was not Kenneth. It was one of these same colleagues. He carried papers in his hand, which, however, he seemed merely to be moving from one office to another, for he did not once look at them. He was a peaked, thinnish fellow with gold-rimmed glasses, and perched himself on a corner of the table.

"Well, how wags it, Wyecastle? Been away yet?" he asked.

"No," Rex replied.

"I haven't seen you about much. Well, what did you think of the Debate last night?"

"I'm afraid I only glanced at it."

"What price Labour now? They're coming on, eh? Oh, skilful—very skilful! Really creditable, and all in the tradition too! He's learning his job!"

"Who?"

"Why, Ransome. I give him full marks for it. His whipping wouldn't have disgraced any party, and the way he put up man after man to talk—divisions on every amendment and motion—regular stream into the lobbies for nearly two and a half hours! Oh, they're learning the ropes all right!"

Ordinarily Rex enjoyed these desultory, purposeless droppings-in between office and office. One learned so much of what was going on, which was seldom what appeared in the papers. But to-day Saunders' visit jarred on him. His talk seemed beside the mark. It was the kind of talk one sometimes heard among lawyers when they are gathered informally together, of a cunning snare laid here, an advantage deftly taken there, the concealment of one motive and the clever substitution of another—unreal, tactical talk, begotten upon itself, with issue nowhere. Rex could have put up an excellent defence of that sort of talk. He had talked it himself for some years. He knew that to talk after any other fashion would be to run the risk of being uncomprehended. There was everything to be said for doing things according to the best parliamentary traditions. It *did* need brains of a special order to control an unruly party. It *did* need skill of sorts to put up man after man to talk. It *did* need command of a kind to keep that constant stream of men moving smoothly in and out of the lobbies. There was no other known way of doing it, and it had to be done lest the other side should nip (so to speak) into play and run out with the game. Rex knew it all

backwards, and how, in the strict party-sense, it mattered little what anyone did or said provided his sayings and doings at one time were reasonably consistent with what he did and said at another. In this, of course, there must be no flaw. Should a flaw unfortunately declare itself, the question must instantly be the question of the lawyer who slightly —oh, ever so slightly!—manipulates a meaning to fit his case. "Could we not put it *this* way?" the lawyer will persuasively say, regardless that the flaw itself might conceivably be the single crumb of truth in the whole elaborate work of art. Oh, Rex knew it all, had done it all, supposed he would have to go on doing it all!

But now, for the first time, he was wondering what Saunders' relish of the tactics of the night before really meant, and whether in the end it meant anything at all except that a new Party was only too readily following in the footsteps of the others.

Saunders remained only a few minutes longer. Getting little response from Rex he gathered up his parcel of papers and departed, to tell them in the next office that something seemed to have come over Wyecastle that did not seem quite reconcilable with the best traditions of the Civil Service.

Hardly had he turned his back when Kenneth Chacey was announced.

As usual, he arrived inopportunely. Coming at that moment, he seemed to bring something horribly actual with him. He was the fly in the ointment, the bit of grit in the soothing departmental jelly, the emery that ground away the smooth-running bearings. There was even something tactless in his refusal to be a paper Kenneth, to whom one could have added bits with a pencil or taken off the corners with an india-rubber. Again Rex, who had just been

making allowances for him, found his presence embarrassing. Emigration was by far the most satisfactory way out. He waved his nephew to a chair.

"Good morning, Kenneth."

"Morning, old fellow."

"Will you have a cigarette?"

Kenneth eyed the proffered porcelain box suspiciously. "Are they Turkish? I think I'll have one of my own if you don't mind."

Once more out came the yellow packet with the H's on the end.

"Well," Rex began, "you can guess why I asked you to come."

"Got it worked out? Good!"

"Here it is." He passed him a half-sheet of paper. "You may take it that that is correct. Of course you can have details if you want them."

Kenneth examined the account with pleased surprise.

"I say! Forty-eight-twelve! That's better than I thought! Well, I suppose I'd better have it—not if it isn't convenient of course——"

Rex was rising and falling on his toes. He seemed to be speaking to his toes.

"I've been wondering whether an alternative couldn't be found." Then, looking up, "Have you ever thought of going abroad?"

Kenneth stared. "Abroad? Me? What for?"

"Of going abroad," Rex continued, "under a scheme that is already approaching its final stages. I won't trouble you with details, but the sum and substance of it is that in certain cases it will probably be decided to advance sums of money on the public account, guaranteed by whatever State the grantee might elect to settle in. In addition to this, and in

your own case "—he glanced at the paper which Kenneth was still regarding with pleasure—" it would not be altogether out of the question that that sum should be increased—even substantially increased."

Kenneth looked up from the paper for an instant, and then down at it again. He sandwiched his refusal casually in between the two glances.

" No thanks, old man."

" I advise you not to be hasty. The thing has been carefully weighed in all its bearings. When the full details are available you will find it's well worth considering."

Kenneth looked up again. " Botany Bay? " he asked.

Rex made a little deprecating gesture. " I should hardly have thought that quite the spirit in which——"

But suddenly Kenneth had laughed, as if at some wandering recollection.

" Remember that song when the Diggers came over, Rex? *'Twasn't leaving Old England we cared about——'* "

" To refuse even to examine a thing, Kenneth——"

" Thanks, old chap, but I think I'll take the forty-eight quid."

" A sum like that won't take you very far."

" It won't take me to Botany Bay."

" Of course if you approach any proposal that is made to you intractably——" Rex began.

" I'm not approaching it at all, old man," Kenneth interrupted, with the best good temper in the world. " It just doesn't appeal to me. If you have your cheque-book on you——"

Rex sighed. It was as he had begun to fear. That brown-faced, typical emigrant, with the look of hope

and the umbilical cord, was not Kenneth. Others, perhaps, would jump gladly at the new Scheme. Others again, less gladly, might weigh the evils they knew against those they could only guess at, and, reversing Hamlet's conclusion, might choose the latter. Others again, with no gladness at all, but rather with anger in their breasts, might care not a farthing where they went so long as they got out of this. But not Kenneth. Kenneth had had all the abroad he wanted. He would a hundred times rather sleep in his bed at the Maeterlinck than out in the open under romantic southern stars. He didn't want to build any bridges nor to dig the foundations of any new towns. He didn't want to hunt his food before he ate it, nor to sink his well before he drank. He liked his car. He liked Jermyn Street and Dover Street and Piccadilly. He liked to be where he could meet his friends, and he very, very much wanted to start a dancing club. Rex or anybody else might tell him that this was mere luxury, that in no way helped forward the world's work, but Kenneth wasn't interested in the world's work. Luxury? What were theatres but luxuries, and half the shops and restaurants, and clothes unless you went about in a boiler-suit, and seaside watering-places, and the greater part of the West End? Kenneth didn't mind work, but it must be work he chose for himself. He wasn't going to be pushed off road-making or sheep-clipping when he wanted to start a dancing club. England, London, were good enough for him. He didn't want to be a nuisance. He wasn't trying to get a bit of his own back. He simply had preferences for which he did not hold himself accountable to anybody, and he preferred the land he knew and forty-eight pounds to three hundred and even a consenting deportation.

"You see, old boy," he explained, "most of the chaps who fancied that sort of thing went long ago. It simply isn't in my line."

"I wish I could discover that you had a line."

"Oh, I've got a line all right. Shove the matches over."

Wearily Rex walked to his table and took his cheque-book from the drawer. He sat down, dipped his pen into the ink, and absently ran his thumb over the edges of the counterfoils. He hadn't wanted it to come to this. He wished he hadn't lost his temper that other morning in the Boys' Room. Now he had rather put himself in a hole. To sign a cheque while foregoing Kenneth's half of the bond would only be throwing good money after bad. To fill in the exact amount—forty-eight pounds twelve shillings—would be strictly business-like, but that somehow had a severity that in his heart he did not feel. Should he make it a round hundred?

His pen hesitated over the new counterfoil. It touched it.

Then suddenly he laid the pen down on the table again.

"What's to be done, Kenneth?" he asked miserably.

Kenneth replied with cheerfulness.

"What? Why, just what we agreed, of course. You buy me right out. Done-gone-finish—see? And I've nothing more to do with the place. See?"

"That seems extreme, when with just a little good will on both sides——"

"That's all right, dear lad. I'll sign the quittance or whatever you call it now."

"I haven't drawn up any quittance."

"Won't take two minutes. We aren't going to

law about it. You've my word, of course, but I'd rather sign something."

"You may be sure it will never be used. The place is as much your home as ever it was, whenever you care to use it."

"Thanks awfully, old boy, but I don't suppose you'll see me there very much."

"Ken!" The tone was deeply wounded. "Need you have said that to me?"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I don't know whether you mean to cause me pain."

"Of course not. Pain? What do you mean? What's all the fuss about? You give me the cheque, I give you the receipt, and the thing's done."

Whether he knew it or not, he had his uncle completely in his power. He had only to do nothing at all and everything was done. A man or a nation that supinely lies down and declares its inability to help itself holds the key of the situation. It holds that key by virtue of the goodness of others. Kenneth certainly did not intend to frequent the Kensington house for his share of which he was waiting to give his discharge, and even more certainly he did not intend to tell his uncle his real reason. Rex might find out what he could. If anything did happen to come to his ears he would still find Kenneth jaunty, mulish, and to be done nothing with.

So, "Well, here's a piece of paper. Let's be getting on with it," said Kenneth.

But Rex was now looking steadily at him, as a doctor might look at a patient whom he suspects to be keeping something back. Kenneth pretended to be unaware of that searching look.

"You know I'm getting married, Kenneth," said the older man quietly.

"Yes. You told me."

"I haven't introduced you to Una yet."

"No more you have. I must meet her of course. Love to. We must fix it up," said Kenneth.

"Is that all you have to say?" Rex asked with deliberate slowness.

"What else is there to say? I did congratulate you and all that."

But still uppermost in Rex's mind was an incident that had happened a week or so before. Only now was the full significance of that incident beginning to appear. He and Una had been sitting on the sofa in the Boys' Room, alone, and her head had lain quietly on his breast. She had seemed lonely and troubled in spirit, and gently his hand had caressed the golden head. Then, without warning, she had flung her arms about his body. Impulsively, of her own accord, she had kissed his cheek, and for no reason that he could see had burst into tears. No man, no woman, knows what is passing in the head that rests on the breast. It is farther than Africa, a world as removed as the stars, for all our lips that touch it. And that had been no embrace of passion. She had run to him as a child runs to an older person, to be rocked to sleep. Gently he had questioned her. Presently she had been better, and had continued her small narrative of the happenings of the day.

Rex had not removed his eyes from Kenneth. He changed his position at the table, putting his hand to his cheek.

"Why aren't you straightforward with me, Kenneth?" he asked quietly.

"Do you mean signing that thing? I'm waiting to sign it," the young man replied.

"Why do you tell me you haven't met my fiancée when you have?"

Kenneth jumped inwardly. Crimes! Here was ice most unpleasantly thin! Unless he looked out for himself he would be overhead in a minute! The devil of it was that he did not know how much Una might have said—for evidently she had said something. She might have confessed to their old acquaintance, or she might merely have confined her admission to their unexpected encounter that morning in South Molton Street.

What a fool he had been not to have an understanding with her!

And there wasn't much time for thinking either. His uncle's eyes were still fixed on his. Well, neck or nothing. He looked as steadily back at Rex.

"I didn't say that," he said boldly.

"What did you say?"

"I said I hadn't been properly introduced to her as your fiancée. I suppose you mean my meeting her in South Molton Street that time. That was a pure accident. I went there to see Winifred Harrowby."

"And then?"

"Your name cropped up. I didn't know there was any secret about it. Anyway, Winifred Harrowby knows quite a lot about us. What beats me is your letting her be there at all. I wouldn't give that woman too many chances if I were you, old thing."

"So you introduced yourselves?"

"What else was there to do?"

Rex pondered.

"Why did you want to see Mrs. Harrowby?"

But Kenneth was prompt.

"To see if she could put me on to any premises for the club. She goes about a lot among these

people, and you didn't see your way to do anything."

"Have you any special reason for avoiding the house where we all lived together?" Rex next asked.

"When I'm bought out of a place I don't hang about it."

"No other reason?"

"Of course not. What other reason should there be?"

"Why do you say that I oughtn't to give Mrs. Harrowby any chances?"

"Well, you did rather stick your finger into her affairs."

"Do you mean that she might owe me a grudge for that—take her revenge in some shape or form?"

Kenneth shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, how can *I* tell? I don't let myself in for these things. I mind my own business. I only know that I should have put Miss Paull into another job if I'd been you."

Rex was silent. What was there to reply when he himself was so very much of his nephew's way of thinking? He realized that he had overshot himself. As a matter of fact he had had only the very slightest grounds for questioning his nephew in this manner. Una had said nothing save that he had called that morning at South Molton Street. The slight appearance of disingenuousness in Kenneth's manner had done the rest. But now not only had his nephew had a straightforward answer to all his questions; he had given him a home-thrust in return. He had not tried to set a trap for Kenneth. If it had had slightly that appearance, that, he supposed, was this wearisome Departmental habit of thought, that for ever kept something in reserve, manœuvred an

opponent into the desired position, and then scored a point.

Not for one moment did he admit to himself his own innermost thought, which was, that his treasure must be guarded, not against Kenneth in particular, but against any man whomsoever who had the advantage of Kenneth's youth.

II

LAMBS

Kenneth left the Organization Office and took the little twisting way that led to St. James's Park. In his pocket was a cheque for exactly forty-eight pounds twelve shillings, and Rex had the sheet of notepaper whereby he had surrendered his last interest in the house in the Kensington Square. Probably Kenneth could not have put into words why he had been so obstinately punctilious about this piece of paper. He merely had the feeling that as matters seemed to stand between him and his uncle it was as well to be what is called "correct." Rex's cross-examination of him seemed to have had the immediate effect of closing no fewer than three houses to him. He would not go to his old home because he would meet Una Paull there. He would not go to Winifred Harrowby's house in Sussex Square for the same reason. And his Saturday morning's appointment in South Molton Street must similarly be washed out.

"I'd better be making a few new pals," he reflected as he entered Birdcage Walk. "What's the time? Oh, half an hour yet. Let's sit down. There are one or two little things——"

He sat down on a bench near the bridge and took from his pocket a number of papers, Rex's cheque among them.

But, first giving it a loving smile, he put the cheque back again. That was not one of the "little things" that for the moment occupied his thoughts.

Now Kenneth, though not bookish, was in his way a great reader of print. He read for information, in the hope that that information might presently prove to be the basis of real knowledge. He never crumpled up unread the circular that was thrust into his hand in the street. He could lose himself in a railway-guide, a wine-list or a bookmaker's book of rules. Prospectuses of limited companies, though he was never seduced by their blandishments, interested him. So did advertisements, Michelin Guides, and catalogues of all kinds. He never passed a "Please Take One" box without taking one. He might not want to lay railway-sleepers or to live in a hut in Saskatchewan, but he was always on the look-out for other doorways to adventure. There wasn't much wrong with little old London when you came to think of it. More happened there than Kenneth knew about, and Kenneth liked to know. All this dense blackness of people, millions of them, swarming about like ants, and not one among them but managed to scrape together a bit of bread-and-stodge in some way—Kenneth read in order to learn how it was done. If he could think of a better way of doing it, good for him. The proper study of mankind is where the other fellow gets his money from. You might take your fiction and your poetry and

that rot. Kenneth liked to get down to brass tacks. High-brow? Low-brow? Kenneth was a No-brow-at-all.

You and I occasionally receive by post papers of the sort that he held in his hand. They come to us marked "Private," "Personal," "Confidential," and may be forwarded from an address we have left a year or two before. We wonder how our names have been ascertained, who has given the number of our house. But where you and I get one of these, Kenneth and his friends get scores. Undergraduates too get a goodly number, with notice punctiliously given that business is not transacted with minors. In Kenneth's hands as he sat there were seven or eight of them. They were money-lenders' circulars, and they offered to the temporarily-embarrassed any sum from £5 to £20,000, without security, on note-of-hand only.

Kenneth's eyes wandered thoughtfully to the wheeling-planks of the empty lake. What he had in mind couldn't be done—he was convinced of that already. So in that sense he was wasting his time. But he was wasting it in an amusing speculation, well calculated to add to a fellow's knowledge of life.

For suppose for a moment it had been feasible. Suppose he had got the necessary number of men and the right kind of men. The risk was only bankruptcy after all. Nay, the risk wasn't even that. Bankruptcy, for the notion that Kenneth amused himself with, was not a risk, but the prime asset itself. Let us enter into his mind as he sat there by the lake, lazy, amused, and with the money-lenders' circulars in his hand.

A young man does not often borrow money when he already has a pocketful of it. He doesn't even

most frequently borrow it because his pocket is empty. Nine times out of ten he borrows it because he already owes it, and doesn't know where else to look to pay his own debt. He is behind his points from the start, with only a slender chance of picking up again.

Now that alluring "You borrow £100, you pay back £105" is worth exactly what it is worth. It states your whole obligation as plainly as words can state it, and you know exactly where you are. "Five per cent.," you say; and if your need of the £100 is great enough you do not stop to wonder whether the repayment of the £105 is what your benefactor in his heart really desires.

It is actually the last of several things he desires.

He doesn't want his money back. He wants the indebtedness to be prolonged, added to, made a permanent condition. He wants to know whether you are married, have children, are tied to a house, what the lease is, and whether you are likely to skip the country. He wants no security. It is security enough for him that you have pawned your years to come, and that he holds the ticket.

Then, when the indebtedness has become a permanent condition, you will see the familiar little paragraph in the evening paper, that of the original £100 the moiety of £600 has already been paid, and process is being served for more.

And don't believe that Kenneth didn't know these things at least as well as you or I. The two invisible commodities on which the whole system rests as on the Pillars of Hercules—the need of money and the fear of being found out if you don't repay it as it falls due—these never so abounded in England before as they do to-day.

It was on the second of these conditions—the fear

of being found out—that Kenneth was interestedly brooding.

For suppose there existed a certain number of men without this fear. Suppose they had a hundred pounds to gain and no characters to lose. Suppose that behind closed doors, quietly and without fuss, with nothing in writing and not too much in speech, they should come to a pact. Singly, they might hesitate to go through the Court; pledged and banded together, would bankruptcy hold many terrors for them? What is bankruptcy but the inability to pay, subject to the provisions about misconduct and intent to defraud? Could the lads of the village in every case pay? Would it always be easy to prove misconduct and the intent to defraud against them? Would it, when the plaintiff reckoned his interest in hundreds per cent.? Where would the sympathy be? Could even a philanthropic lender of money on simple note-of-hand stand up before such an organized and multiple exposure?

Perhaps he could. Kenneth didn't know. He hadn't made a special study of the Moneylenders' Acts.

And what was the matter with the scheme morally? People had to get money where it was, and where should it be if not at a moneylender's? Were moneylenders in business for their health? Was most business-morality very much more than the scrupulous honouring of a contract that cut the throat of one of the signatories the moment he put his name to it? The moneylender might have the money, but who had the credit? It would be all on the other side. The borrower, not the lender (and always supposing everything was properly organized) would have the moving story to tell. He, with his record of service and his ribbons and scars to vouch for it—

he, and not the gentleman who sent out the affable circulars, would be the picturesque figure. What is an Old Soldier? He is a man who has to keep an eye open for these things. What is he when he is old in service even though he may be young in years? He is one who brings new blood into the business and gives it a fillip. He will not sit on a pavement and lick his sores this time. All manner of expedients, new as broadcasting, are at his finger-tips. Because he is young, his contemporaries, who think as he does, are still about him. Not all of them will go abroad under Rex's scheme. Some will stay, and be rejected by the Trade Unions. Kenneth knew those who would stay. They would stay as long as their clothes lasted, and would then, with a bit of luck, get hold of some more fortunate young man, introduce him to a good tailor, secure a nice order, wink, and get a new suit for themselves to start all over again with. As long as they could tie a passable evening tie they would go about, always merry and bright, and recommend jewellers to women and call the morning after the purchase for the secret commission. The lads of the village belong to the village, and they would very much rather not leave it.

Kenneth put his papers back into his pocket, yawned, and rose. He wasn't borrowing money just at the moment, and he had decided to spare Cork Street a little longer before he made his massed attack on it. He crossed the Park and the Mall in the direction of St. James's Palace.

It was in the Chittibangbang Club, in the little room upstairs, that he met Garstin and Blythe. Kenneth, who had a car, was not a member of the Chittibangbang. Blythe, who had no car, was.

At Kenneth's first words, which came to him without an instant's premeditation, not one of the

three of them was half as surprised as Kenneth himself.

"I say, who says a swim before lunch?" he said; and then, turning round as it were upon himself, he added in astonishment, "I say, you fellows, did you hear me say that?"

They looked at him with concern. They gazed inquiringly at one another. They conferred over him like two doctors over a patient.

"Did he say *swim?*"

"I thought he did."

"Exercise?"

"Sounded like it."

"Has he been like this long?"

"Never knew him like it before."

"Can he have come into money?"

"He's evidently had some sort of a shock."

Kenneth grinned. "Pity this is your pub, Blythe. I'd have bought you a drink."

"Don't let that worry you, sonnie. If you feel like that you can buy us lunch."

"Right you are," said Kenneth with alacrity, and again they looked at him with concern.

"I say, Chacey, if this is a joke it's in the worst of taste, I hope you know," said Blythe.

But it was no joke. He showed them the cheque, allowed them to take it in their hands and stroke it. He had even more money than that, for he had had loose money before Rex had given him the cheque. He was, to be exact, the possessor of fifty-one pounds sixteen shillings and ninepence. Heaven knew when he would have as much again. He felt bucked, joyous. Buy them lunch? He would have bought them half a dozen lunches.

There and then they went into committee on (*a*) the possibility and (*b*) the prudence of cashing the cheque

at the Chittibangbang. If Blythe were to write his name across the back of it and send it down to the secretary's office he might be asked to settle certain arrears that had been outstanding for rather a long time against him. Garstin, who was also a member, could only shake his head; it was quite useless for him to ask the office to cash *his* paper. In the middle of the discussion there entered a brand-new member, whose credit could not possibly be impaired yet. He was nodded to, he was bought a drink, the subject was broached. He turned out to be the financial super-man for whom they had been looking. Airily he asked for a pen, called a page, said " Fivers do ? " and the secretary had his compliments. The money was brought.

The feel of those fivers in his pocket must have affected Kenneth rather like a touch of the sun, for not only had he proposed a swim, but he insisted on having it. Down in the basement the cool green swimming-bath presently resounded to three hollow plunges. Three figures, lithe and muscular and as good as you need look for anywhere, save that one of them showed a puckered roly-poly of a stump, drove through the rocking water from end to end and back. Then they dressed again, and three fresh-looking young men stepped into a taxi at the door of the Chittibangbang and drove up through St. James's Square.

But half-way through lunch, which they took at the place in Piccadilly where Dot the barmaid served the drinks, the first cloudlet crossed the sun of this, Kenneth's day of days. Blythe had glanced at the clock, Garstin at his gridded wrist-watch. They were on duty with their respective ladies that afternoon, and Kenneth must make shift without their company.

"Oh, damn!" Kenneth grumbled. "Why must the old trout want you to-day? Can't you telephone or something?"

"Da oftena you maka da day da more you maka da monsh," said Blythe, who was on piece-work.

"Where are you taking her?" said Kenneth grudgingly.

"Doreen's, Bond Street, mine, and then on to Hanover Square. Hats," Garstin murmured into his liqueur-glass.

"Mine's a private-view, and I've got to beat up a photographer too. She raised stink because she wasn't in the *Tatler* last week," observed Blythe.

"What time are you going to be finished? What about this evening?"

Garstin shook his head. "Theatre," he said.

Blythe shook his head. "Dancing," he said.

"Nice life of pleasure you blokes lead!" Kenneth growled. "Meals, shows, dancing, theatres! Couldn't you have made it a Turker day for 'em?"

On the days when their proprietresses took their Turkish baths Blythe and Garstin were necessarily excused attendance on them.

"Anyway, how were we to know you were coming into pelf?" they asked.

"But I shall be left all alone!" Kenneth complained.

"You will, my son, and that right speedily," said Blythe. "In ten minutes, to be exact. Will it run to another rum-ration?"

Garstin turned to Blythe.

"Does yours still take the H from the beginning of 'height' and stick it on the end?" he asked, as one who compares notes with a fellow-labourer in the same field.

" Her Ladyship is still unchanged in that particular," Blythe replied.

Kenneth ordered another round of liqueur brandies.

They had been late in sitting down to lunch; now the waiters were re-setting the tables for the evening. A couple of them had changed into street jackets and bowlers, while retaining the trousers of their employment. Kenneth's bill lay folded by his plate. All at once Blythe and Garstin jumped up together.

" Aren't you going to put us into a couple of taxis, too? " they demanded.

" No. You're pampered enough. I'm going to sit here and finish my coffee," said Kenneth sullenly.

" Well, thanks for the food," said Blythe.

" You can ring up your broker from here, you know," said Garstin.

" So long——"

They nodded and were off, leaving Kenneth sitting alone save for the waiters and a crowd of well-set-up, cheery, good-looking young fellows, whom he presently discovered to be himself, reflected and re-reflected in the multitudinous mirrors that panelled every pillar and shone from every wall.

III

FIFTY ODD POUNDS

He had money in his pocket. He could go out and buy boots, socks, handkerchiefs, ties. He could go to a cinema, he could take the car into the country for a spin. He could look in to see what was happening on the blackboard in Holborn. There was the National Gallery to go to, or the British Museum, or a dozen other places where he might have spent his time in improving his mind. There were picture-exhibitions, free-libraries, probably a concert or recital at the Little Queens' or Wigmore Halls. There might be a match at the Oval or Lord's.

But not one of these things appealed to him. He sat there by his half-finished coffee, not even ordering another liqueur, although five minutes yet remained in which to do so. Perhaps his unaccustomed swim had made him a little heavy. He yawned, and twenty Kenneths in the mirrors yawned with him.

He didn't know what the cloud was that had suddenly come over the day. True, he usually arranged his waking hours so as to be alone for as few moments of them as he could, but Blythe and Garstin were not the only men he knew. He could go to a dozen places and find somebody to chat to in every one of them. Something had put a damper on his usual spirits. Even the fifty pounds, which had

so recently seemed a very comfortable sum to possess, appeared suddenly shrunk.

Fifty pounds! What was it after all? Invested, it might bring him in the magnificent return of two pounds ten per annum. Put into business as capital it might suffice to stock a fruiterer's barrow. Spent on his friends, it might last a week; spent on himself, perhaps a month. He was twenty-six. He supposed that barring accidents he would go on living for some years longer. Say he lived another twenty-six years? Where was the money coming from that was going to feed and clothe and house him during that time? Oh, he knew that that was an idiotic way of looking at it! Anybody could get scared stiff at the whole idea of life if they made the blackest of it like that! Yet he found a certain moody relish in doing so. This relish almost approached a saturnine enjoyment as he proceeded to ask himself how many people were really any better off than he. As far as Kenneth could see they "worked," as they called it, at this or that, so many hours a day, so many weeks a year. They ate their wages as they went along, and so were enabled to do a little more and to eat a little more, to eat a little more and to do a little more. At the end of twenty-six years of it, by pinching and saving, they might have as much money in their pockets as Kenneth had at that moment. He didn't know how much funerals cost nowadays. He had known them quite cheap.

He sipped his coffee as he thought of these things, and the Kenneths in the mirrors sipped their coffee also.

And yet he wasn't one of your Bolshies. Kenneth had no use for Bolshies at all. When the big strike had been on, and all manner of people had driven locomotives and clipped tickets and swept platforms

and tall bicycles had suddenly appeared in the London streets, Kenneth had helped with the milk-cans in Hyde Park. Blackleg labour, the Bolshies had called that, and they could call it what they liked for all Kenneth cared. He thought Bolshies ought to be poleaxed. And during the time that strike had lasted Kenneth had been as happy as a king. He wanted to be useful. What he couldn't understand was that nobody seemed to have any use for him until a strike or some other trouble blew up. In the intervals he seemed to be unrequired.

And he didn't want a dole or its equivalent either. He felt strongly about doles. He didn't see, for example, why any part of his fifty-odd pounds should go to keep somebody he had never heard of. He wanted to be useful, and that perhaps was the bottom of the whole thing—doing nothing at all got so damned dull after a time. Working a bit so that you might eat a bit and eating a bit so that you might work a bit more was a rum way of spending your life in Kenneth's view, but at any rate these fellows with jobs had company of sorts. They were in the swim, and not sitting in an empty restaurant at three o'clock in the afternoon because there wasn't anything else to do. For four years of his life Kenneth had had any amount of companionship, and had liked it. True, that companionship had been highly subject to interruption, but a fellow had at least been in the thick of whatever had happened to be going on, and not side-tracked out of everything like this until the next strike. It was this infernal hanging about that did a fellow in. But even if he did get a job—he had had many jobs—there wasn't any security. The fellow who gave you the job was probably hanging on by the skin of his teeth just as you were yourself.

Kenneth would have given his fifty-odd pounds

there and then, and taken his coat off too, for a job with a reasonable hope of security in it.

Then he allowed himself a really good, enjoyable, whole-hearted grumble, all about nothing. He was just " fed." It wasn't a case of what it was; it was a case of what wasn't it. And he knew now what had brought the whole thing to a head. It was having money at all—even fifty-odd pounds. Five thousand pounds he would have known what to do with. With five hundred he might have done himself a bit of good too. But fifty! Look at the prices of things! In spite of everything, people still talked of fifty pounds as if fifty pounds still meant what it had meant in the days when beer had been twopence, whisky fourpence, and no end of an outcry raised if they tried to plunder you eightpence for a double-and-Schweppes! His fifty pounds was something and nothing. It was just enough to whet and not enough to satisfy. It was too much for a tip, but it wouldn't go far in meals.

And so it might as well provide another liqueur now.

But it was too late. Three o'clock had struck. He rose, left the loose silver on the plate for the waiter, and walked out, while the Kenneths in the mirrors too moved away in innumerable different directions. He did not lift his eyes to them. Probably if he had done so nothing in their simultaneous dispersal would have struck him as in any way symbolic.

For suddenly he knew that he had been humbugging himself all the time. He knew that it wasn't a question of saving or investing or spending. It wasn't a question of working only at strike-time and letting somebody else do the work in between. It wasn't a question of the companionship of work or of the loneliness of those who did nothing. No doubt

the fifty-odd pounds had begun it. That single hour of solitude that he so habitually avoided had taken it a stage further.

Now, all at once, he realized that the days when he had last had money had been the days of the Forestry job, of the Vision, and of Una Paull.

That is the worst of denying a thing too vehemently. The very violence of the denial becomes an admission. We tell ourselves that we have put a certain thing out of our lives, and we go on telling ourselves so. By dint of repetition we delude ourselves that it is so. We persuade ourselves that stock has been taken, a balance struck, and a double line ruled across the account. And lo! Something that has been there all the time, not dead at all, but hiddenly growing, stirs in our hearts, and our crust of resolution is cracked as the pavement is cracked by the tender springing things beneath.

He had skated successfully over thinnish ice with his uncle. To Una he had made his brag that he might be a waster but he wasn't a cad. But in reality neither Una nor his uncle had had anything at all to do with it. The scales had merely fallen from his own eyes. He knew that not for one single moment had he ceased to love her. He loved her still, and would never again tell himself that he did not.

Slowly he turned up Park Lane and into Stanhope Gate.

About him people rode, walked, drove; but he hardly saw them. He was thinking of that useless fifty pounds, and of that useless love. How gladly would he have been without either if only he could also have been rid of this damnable dead-weight on his mind! But don't imagine that he pictured himself as cutting any particularly dramatic figure. That

was the trouble—he wasn't cutting any figure at all. He was only a spectator, or at most a " super " or walking-on gentleman, more than usually " fed," watching the drama of the principals of life.

You do see these oldish young men, aimlessly strolling in the Park of a summer's afternoon. They have not always fifty pounds in their pockets; many of them have not fifty pence. But it comes to much the same thing in the end.

But nothing lasts, not even a fit of brooding. It might have been the air, it might have been the movement, but he presently felt a little better. He was past Hyde Park Corner, approaching the Serpentine, and people's faces had begun to interest him again. Kenneth thought he was rather good at faces. At one time a lot had depended on giving (as one might say) the right job to the right face, and he often walked about, allotting imaginary tasks, of varying degrees of " cushiness," to those that passed him. This rather hen-faced fellow with the stare, for example, he would have trusted himself anywhere, on any rotten old job, and he didn't think he would have been let down either. But that other chap, murmuring to himself as he walked, didn't look altogether " on the spot," and the chances were that he ought never to have been allowed within twenty miles of a gun. A third man might have counted nuts and bolts or tins of bully-beef fairly well (which isn't quite the simple thing it sounds), but he looked as if he would always be going sick. A fourth he would not have had at any price. And so on. On the whole, the faces he met did not strike him as being quite so good a lot as some he remembered.

The faces of women interested him equally, though with a more simplified appeal.

It was the face of a woman that caught his attention

a little way north of the Serpentine. Smartly turned-out too, by Jove! Kenneth straightened his back, wondered how he was looking.

Then, though for the moment he couldn't place it, it seemed to him that he knew the face and general carriage. Women did alter themselves so, now with only the tips of their noses showing, or some other new-fangled way——

Then she turned and stopped.

"And how are *you*, Kenneth?" she asked him, putting her head back.

Straightway he "had her cold." Only her mouth and chin came fairly out into the open; the rest was silver-fox furs and a hat of innumerable tiny blue feathers, under which the brown eyes peeped like martins from their nest in an eaves. But Kenneth would have known her voice anywhere.

"I believe the wretched man's forgotten me!" the voice softly reproached him.

"No, I haven't," said Kenneth. "You're Winifred Harrowby."

"Ah, but you took at least five minutes to think! Well, and how's the world using you, Kenneth?"

"So-so. Not too bad," Kenneth replied. "Which way were you going?"

"I was just taking a turn on this lovely day. I must be getting back presently."

"Come and have some tea."

"That's very nice of you," she said.

"Hyde Park?"

"That sounds delightful. It's always so cool in there."

"Then come along."

Already his mind was at work. In her vellum-bound book in South Molton Street an appointment was entered that he had decided that very morning

he was not going to keep. It was for Saturday—the next day. But he remembered that Una had said that she was returning on the Friday, which was to-day. And here she was. That was a stroke of luck.

He glanced at her furs, her hat, her cothurned feet, and again he wondered how she had managed to do it. Six or seven years ago she had been penniless, and look at her now! Five shillings for tea at the Hyde Park would be money well spent on a woman like that!

"But isn't it early for tea? Let's sit down," she said.

They did so, on two chairs under the trees.

"Well, Kenneth, so you aren't married yet?" she began without preface.

"No," he said absently.

"And what are you doing now? Let me see, weren't you going to be a woodsman, chopping down trees, or something nice and Robin-Hoodish like that?"

"I was," he admitted.

"Didn't it come off?"

She might have seen that. Once more she was getting at him. But he answered quietly.

"Afraid it didn't. And at the present moment I'm doing nothing at all."

"But that's *so* bad for you, Kenneth!"

"A bit boring in the winter, but I don't mind it this weather."

"And so you're coming to see me to-morrow?" she next asked.

Ah! So she had been to the office and had seen her appointment-book! Her voice was honey. He remembered that it always had persuaded one as long as one listened to it. When one left her one was

not quite so sure. The one thing of which Kenneth was doubly sure was that Rex had been a silly ass not to let her and her affairs alone.

Almost as if she read his thoughts, suddenly she mentioned his uncle's name.

"So Rex is going to be married?"

"Yes," he said shortly.

"That's why I took her into my business of course. I don't know how well-off Rex is, but I believe in girls having a little money of their own."

"Rather!" said Kenneth absent-mindedly. It was not a pressing matter for him. He had fifty-odd pounds in his pocket.

Also he was thinking of something quite different. He was, in fact, wondering at what point of her engagement to Rex Una had learned that he, Kenneth, was Rex's nephew. But there was something about the woman at his side that warned him that it would be better to steer clear of the whole subject. The premises for the dancing-club were a much safer topic. It was for this, and not to talk about Una Paull, that he was spending five shillings for tea.

But suddenly she laughed outright.

"You *do* amuse me, Kenneth!" she informed him.

"Oh?" he said politely.

"You always did. I always liked you for it."

"Very good of you," he said in the same stiff tone.

Then she turned on him. The honeyed voice was good-humouredly scolding.

"Why, oh *why*, did you behave in that idiotic way?"

"I really don't know what you mean," said Kenneth blandly.

" You know very well what I mean. I mean with Una, of course."

" What idiotic way did I behave with Una? " he asked.

She did him a sort of honour. She came straight to the point.

" Stuff! And don't tell me what happened in restaurants either! As if *that* wouldn't have blown over in a week! No, you got on your dignity. You deliberately turned your back on her. You never came near her, and the poor child crying her eyes out about it all—getting over it as they say——"

" Well, do you mind if we don't talk about it? " he said. " If commercial travellers fall in love it's their own look-out, you know."

She put up her small hands.

" And now he's doing the picturesque! As if *that* had anything to do with it! "

" I should have thought it had quite a lot to do with it. You evidently don't know."

One of the hands put this aside.

" Oh, I know all that. That's a detail, after all. But I'll tell you what isn't a detail. If you tell me that here's a whole generation of young men too hard-up to marry and they don't know what to do about it—well, I simply don't believe you."

" All right, you needn't," said Kenneth doggedly.

" Why," she broke out, " what do you suppose is going to happen? What always did happen? What always will happen? What's happening every day? You come to me with a tale like that! "

Kenneth gave her a sidelong look. " I say, I'm a bit afraid of you," he said; and if he had said that he was a good deal afraid of her he would have been nearer the truth.

She put one hand on his sleeve.

"Perhaps I know more about it than you think, Kenneth," she said, suddenly changing her ground. "I've had my struggle too, don't forget. I've heard all that about marriage and economics before. They'll find there's something stronger than economics."

"Maybe," said Kenneth. He was having nothing to do with this. He didn't intend to touch it with the end of a long pole. The common-or-garden variety of Bolshevism was bad enough, but when it came to the sinister glimpse Mrs. Harrowby had so plainly hinted at—thanks, not for Kenneth!

"And as for getting over it," she went on, "some do and some don't, but more still don't know whether they have or not. They may think they have, but quite a little thing will bring it all up again."

"In that case there's just one thing to be done," said Kenneth shortly.

"What's that?"

"Get it under, and take thundering good care it stops there."

And then his manner suddenly changed. It became bright and businesslike.

"And oh, by the way, I wanted to ask you something. Do you happen to know of a house with a large dancing-room, for thirty couples say—afraid nothing smaller'd be any good—supper-room, ladies' cloak-rooms and all that—in London of course—sort of place that would do for a club?"

So pointedly had he changed the subject that she saw fit to repay him in his own coin. They had risen from their seats. Suddenly she struck the small gloved hands together.

"Oh! And *I've* only this moment remembered! That was the pleasure of seeing you again, Kenneth! Do get me into a taxi—I must hurry back! So sorry

about tea! . . . A house for a club? I'll make inquiries. Come and see me about it——"

They were by the French Embassy. She held up her umbrella for a taxi that passed.

"Forgive me, won't you? And do come and see me. Good-bye——"

She was gone, leaving him still standing there, with the fifty-odd pounds in his pocket.

IV

THE GAP

To all appearances, Rex's inspiration of setting up the Herefordshire room in London had been admirably successful. He had sought to spare his mother some of the jarrings of change, and had undoubtedly done so. Her flowers were bought in the Brompton Road, but she arranged them as if the old gardens had been still about her. The wall across the strip of garden might have been espaliered with cherry and plum, the serried South Kensington backs might have been the hills beyond. The photographs and the other intimate objects of the room were as they had always been, her memories of them were fixed. And there was Rex himself, never very far away, ever watchful for her comfort. At seventy-two his mother rested peacefully in haven. Could Rex have done more?

Yet a haven is no longer a haven when it has ceased to communicate with the sea. It is too, too peaceful when the troublous but renewing tides have retreated so far that not a ripple stirs the craft within, and its own water oozes imperceptibly away, and all that is known of tempest and strife is the faint line of restless white far out towards the horizon. The sounds of these thunders seldom reached Mrs. Wyecastle. What vessels broke up there, what lifeboats were put out to help the strugglers, were hidden from her. The newspapers were full of things she had ceased to comprehend. She used yesterday's *Morn-*

ing Post to snip her flowers on, and then had the sodden bundle of stalks carried out by Edwards. It was a gentle little old lady who moved about doing these things, with a Mary-Queen-of-Scots peak over her fleecy white hair, dressed always in black, with a narrow white relief at throat and wrists. And she knitted much. It was an old habit she had revived some years before and never re-discarded. She used an old-fashioned needle-holder, which lay in her basket of silks and wools when it was not tied with its black tape about her waist.

Occasionally a vague contact still mildly moved her. One of these had been the news of Rex's engagement; and there were always the ups-and-downs of Kenneth's fortunes to thrill her faintly. But these happenings she somehow classed as more actual than real. They were actual in the sense that there they were, to be reckoned with, she supposed; but they were less real than the things she seemed to remember. Rex's engagement did not seem of the same stuff that her own had been. Kenneth's trials and troubles had a quality of hearsay about them. They of Kenneth's generation in particular seemed a different kind of people—people, of course, but much as a tree may be either an oak or a palm. They "blew in," those young people—which phrase, of all their slang, struck Mrs. Wyecastle as being merely a heightened, and possibly poetical expression, of a literal fact. They blew in as if on a wind, eddying about the house as the dead leaves had eddied in at the windows of the old Herefordshire home. They had made whirlwinds about her for a space, and had then blown out again on another wind, another scurry of brown. They had been her grandsons, Kenneth and his brothers and their friends. And, because the Boys' Room had always been the Girls'

Room too, especially they had trailed their young women after them. Ronnie, Kenneth, Toby, Claude —Cissie, Fairy, Joan, Gwen—they had come with throbbings of cars and thutterings of motor-bikes, the girls so putteed and breeched and helmeted that Ronnie might almost have been Joan, Joan Ronnie. Of course Mrs. Wyecastle had been perfectly well aware that a war was "on," yet somehow she couldn't account for these young women. They didn't in the least remind her of Mr. Millais' "Black Brunswicker," before which she had stood at the Royal Academy, with tears in her eyes, hoping that such anguish of parting would never be hers. Except for Ronnie and Joan, she could never gather that these identically-garbed young persons were in any sense affianced to one another. They had merely (to use another of their expressions) "got off."

And even when they had removed their peaked caps, showing smooth dark hair, or bobbed, or a sunburst of curls, the girls had somehow failed to become young women. It was not their breeches. In the sense that they were all legs they could hardly be said to have legs at all. No: to Mrs. Wyecastle, mother and grandmother, they lacked "figures." Yet they were old enough to have had figures. Even supposing young people did marry later nowadays than in her own time (and marriage had a good deal to do with the riper curves)—even then, Gwen (whose other name she had forgotten, but it was on the photograph there) had been as flat as Fairy (whose real name she didn't remember ever to have heard at all).

So they had romped and danced and smoked their cigarettes and swung their legs in the copied room, and then one by one they had blown out again, not to be seen by Mrs. Wyecastle any more. Ronnie's Joan had married somebody else; what had become

of the others she did not know. Ronnie's telegram and that of Claude had come within a few days of one another. Toby's had come a week or two later. Only Kenneth had had no telegram—for of course Maurice had been far too young. Now that Kenneth so seldom came near, Maurice and Rex's fair-haired fiancée were all that Mrs. Wyecastle saw of the youngest generation.

She sat in the Boys' Room, casting on. The sun had moved round, and a honey-coloured afternoon light softly filled the place. On one corner of the drawn sunblinds the shadow of a plane-tree branch moved gently to and fro, or that of a bird passed from time to time. Rex had said that he might be a little late for tea. Una, on the other hand, was coming early.

In Mrs. Wyecastle's opinion, Una was neither Joan nor Fairy nor Cissie nor Gwen. She didn't quite know where to place her. If such a thing had been possible, there were times when Una might almost have been the daughter of Fairy or Joan; but Fairy had never looked like having a daughter, and Joan's daughter was barely six months old. Una, as a matter of fact, was only three or four years younger than either of them. Yet if they were (so to speak) sisters, nobody would have thought it. It was almost as if events had produced a generation within a generation, coterminous with itself, without either roots in the past or promise of fruit for the time to come.

She did think ("One, two, three, four," she counted the stitches on the needle) that Rex had perhaps left matters a little late. In her heart of hearts, at one time and another, she had had a dozen different plans for him. There had been So-and-so ("such a dear girl!")—and So-and-so ("so domes-

ticated ! ")—and So-and-so (" with money of her own too, one, two, three, four "). It would secretly have gladdened Mrs. Wyecastle's heart if Rex had married any of these, twenty or twenty-five years ago. But two of them were grandmothers and a third dead, and all their names were now only faint tinklings as of far-off morning bells, their faces faded flowers in that *hortus siccus* of Mrs. Wyecastle's memory.

So she supposed it would have to be Una—(" nine, ten, eleven, twelve ").

Edwards entered with the tea-tray, and she looked up.

" Do you happen to know, Edwards," she asked, dropping the knitting to her lap, " whether Mr. Kenneth's left where he's been living ? "

" I couldn't say, ma'am, but I could find out."

" It must be nearly two months since he was here."

" No, ma'am. He was here about ten days ago."

" Then I can't have been told. Always tell me when he comes. Always tell me when Mr. Kenneth comes, Edwards."

" Yes, ma'am."

Edwards retired, and she gave herself to her wanderings again.

She was the fonder of Kenneth because of a certain guilty complicity between them. The old lady had her little secrets. Rex would have been very cross had he known of the small sums of money she pressed into his hand from time to time. Kenneth had " got off " with his grandmother just as he had always got off with every other girl who had come to the house. Mrs. Wyecastle fully expected him to get off with Una too. She was knitting him a pair of thick winter socks now, and revolving cunning little traps to lure him to the house. " Twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight——"

"Miss Paull," Edwards announced, and, following Una down, connected the kettle, which immediately broke into a soft mutter.

Mrs. Wyecastle stretched out her hands.

"Una! Darling girl! But let me look at you. Do I see you a little pale?"

She held her away at arm's-length as she spoke the last words.

A young girl, dreaming of a sweetheart as it were in the air, paints in the dear imagined figure in isolation, lovelily existing without background. Friends, family, home, occupations, all are vignetted vaguely away. But the day comes when these start forward, and it was with a curious wistfulness that Una looked upon Rex's mother. Such histories, experiences, learned lessons of all kinds, must lie behind that faded old face! They seemed to make the background almost as real as Rex himself. To place her head on Rex's shoulder was sometimes to be aware, not of rest, but of a sudden loneliness. He was a gentle, loving, ever-present stranger. She wanted to talk to somebody who had been a girl too, somebody older and wiser than herself, who knew the world and life.

To whom should she turn, if not to Rex's mother?

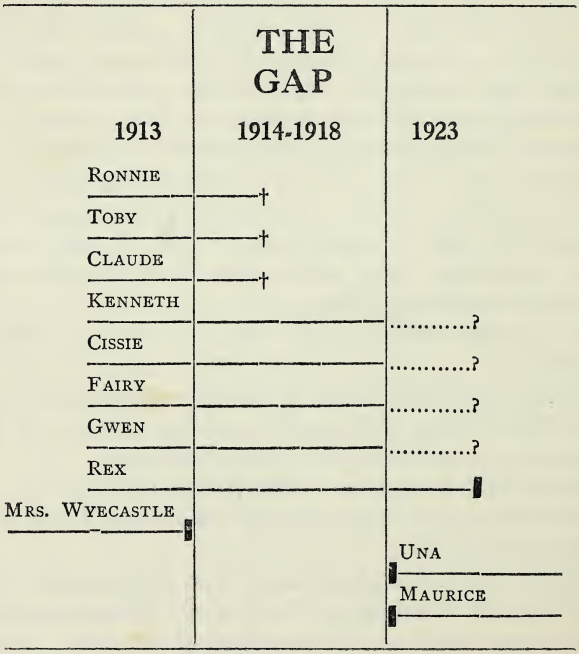
"And your hands are positively cold—on a day like this!" Mrs. Wyecastle scolded her, as if the coldness of her hands had been her fault.

Una withdrew them. "Shall I make tea?"

"Please. And then tell me what you have been doing all day."

Would the old woman have been very much wiser had the girl been able to tell her? Was she much wiser when she had told her what she could? Very,

very little. For a Gap has cloven our Time in twain. Across body and spirit alike that chasm has cut. Many plunged into that gulf to be heard of no more, and of those who have continued to live not all can be said to have survived. How shall we picture that enormous fact that has left not one of our spirits as it was before? A few straight lines, a few double bars, that close down on body or soul or both. It has left us those we love more than all on earth, as a mother keeps her inmost heart, not for the whole child, but for the maimed one. England to-day, their mother, loves them more than all else. A little patience, then, till the way shall be found. We all seek it. We have only to come together. Look.



Rex survived because he had found a bridge. Kenneth survived, sometimes he could not imagine how, but a changed Kenneth, moulded to something different. A wooden cross (look) will serve for his brothers, and Joan and Cissie and Gwen have not always come off scatheless. Nor have you. Nor have I.

And what of the two who sat together in that room —old Mrs. Wyecastle and young Una Paull?

They faced one another across that irreparable breach, the one on the yonder side of it, the other on this. To Mrs. Wyecastle even the deaths of her grandsons had mercifully been permitted to be episodic. She had ceased to live on from the moment when the earth had yawned. Horror had passed her by. Thenceforward her life lay behind her.

But with that yawning Una's life had only just begun. She knew little more of that convulsion than one knows of the thunder-storm that rolls away behind one. True, she must live in the wrack and aftermath of it, but she had known nothing else. So, though her face was set towards the brightness, her path lay across the not yet untroubled To-day, where moved a generation, her contemporaries in time, but her forerunners in everything else.

And she came to Rex's mother for help and understanding.

"Something's troubling you, child; you don't look yourself. Come and tell me what it is," Mrs. Wyecastle said placidly.

But Una was silent. For some reason she could not begin. With all the will in the world, the one of them to take, the other to give, she was conscious of the inhibition. And nothing would have persuaded Mrs. Wyecastle that she did not understand. Back, half a century back, half a civilization back, went

her thoughts. How well she knew these April days of alternating doubt and love! It had all happened before. The world didn't alter. As it had been, so it still was.

The hand whose work was done patted the young one that rested on her knee.

"These are the happiest days of your life, child, if you only knew it," she said.

Una was silent, looking down and away. Her days were not happy.

"You do love my boy, don't you?"

Una's voice was low. "Of course. I'm frightfully fond of him."

"They don't say 'love' nowadays!" said Mrs. Wyecastle, gently arch.

How the girl longed to get it all over! That thing so wonderful that all life, all nature, all art, are about it and nothing else—she wished it was over. Perhaps when she married things would begin to have a meaning of some sort; at present there seemed to be no meaning in anything that happened to her. Once, a few years ago, and for a short time, there had seemed to be one; but now she was never so lonely as when her head rested on Rex's shoulder.

Yet she never wanted to see Kenneth again. She forced her eyes not to see his photograph on the table.

Surely, surely, somehow, somewhere, there ought to have been somebody, something, that would have made all the difference!

"It will all come right, it will all come right. I know, I know," Mrs. Wyecastle was saying.

"Oh, I wonder if you *do* know!" broke from Una in a low voice.

Gently, smilingly, the old lady scolded herself.

"Foolish, foolish old grannie! She knows noth-

ing! She's lived all these years without learning anything! Young people know everything——"

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" said Una quickly, as her hand sought the other hand on the knee. "But things *are* different. They *can't* be the same as they were when you were young. Everything was settled then. Now everything's in little bits. I see it every day——"

But she checked herself. Some instinct warned her that the less she said about Winifred Harrowby, her business and her interpretation of the world, the better it might be. Rex hated the whole idea of her occupation in South Molton Street, and was Mrs. Wyecastle likely to understand things that puzzled Una herself more and more as the days went on?

Winnie had said, when she had left Una in charge, that they would go properly into things on her return. Well, they had been into them—at least Una supposed they had. And she was not one scrap wiser. There always seemed to be something she wasn't told. She was given drafts and portions of letters to write, the remaining portions of which she never saw. They were letters to house and estate agents and to decorators, which were mysteriously marked "Personal" or "Private" or "Personal and Urgent." These Winnie opened herself, and replied to herself. Una was reluctant to disbelieve in Winnie's openness. She had heard her say over and over again that she was not an estate agent and that it was a matter of indifference to her which firm her clients went to. She was merely a consultant. And even if it turned out that she did take commissions, acted as it were as a sort of outrider to the large firms, why not openly say so? There was nothing disgraceful in it after all. It wasn't strictly truthful, perhaps, but Una knew that things like that did go

on in business. It was the concealment from Una herself that set Una thinking. Sometimes, as had happened that very afternoon, she was given leave to go out and amuse herself when a particular client called. How could she have told Mrs. Wyecastle any of these things? They were not her secrets even had she known them. The very room in which Rex's mother spent most of her time seemed to put her farther and farther away, a different life in a different world. Una had already told her all about her home, her parents, her school, the rest of her short history. She had said it more than once, and one cannot go on saying the same things over and over again. She could take Mrs. Wyecastle's hand, place her head on her knee, kiss the faded brow. But talk to her about the things she hungered to talk about she could not. There was the Gap.

"I expect it will all come right," she sighed.

A shadow fell on the sunblind, and outside a step was heard. The glass doors were thrown open, and there entered, not Rex, but Maurice Chacey, in tennis-flannels, fresh from a hard-fought game.

V

THE NEW CROP

All up and down the country the newspapers—the evening editions on Saturday and the dailies on Monday morning, with the *Sunday Times* or the *Referee* intervening—give a certain amount of space

to Maurice and his week-end doings. Pass over the middle pages with their headlines and important news, and turn to the odd corners where the type is small and densely set. There you find his name or the name of his side. When you read, in the winter,

School of Mines pts. 3. *Nemos pts.* 0

you know that thirty of him have made athletic history in the brief announcement; and in the summer the laconic

School of Mines 200 *for* 7 *inn. dec.*
Nemos 130 *for* 4. *Match drawn*

means that two-and-twenty Maurices have mightily striven. Occasionally there is added "*Chacey* 4 *for* 3," and then Maurice's cup of bliss is full. The smudged strip is cut out and placed in his pocket-book with as much pride as if it had been a ribbon or an order, inside the breast instead of outside. Say to Maurice, "Well, Chacey, I saw your name in the paper the other day," and he is yours for life.

All up and down the land it goes on, and no man knows what Waterloos are winning on the Kensington hard courts, the sports-ground within a tram-ride of the towns, or the perilous pitches of Battersea Park. Saturday afternoon is the time to see them. They are on the outskirts of every suburb, there is hardly a patch of green or a brickfield but has its game of sorts. With little hand-bags in the winter and long carpet-bags in the summer, they fill the trams and trains and tubes from midday on. Or it may be tennis or hockey or golf. Maurice, in his upspringing thousands, is sure to be doing something with a stick or a club or a ball. Once in a while, for an International match, he may join the swarms that

blacken the way to Twickenham, or be found by the mound-stand at Lord's. He may go to see a game of squash or squeeze his way into a glove-fight at Olympia or the Albert Hall. But mostly he plays.

Now you and I remember Ormonde and Bend Or, Fred Archer and Spofforth, Gould and Tom Emmett and Ulyett and W. G. George. Our own sons may even remember those who came immediately after these. And when we or our sons talk, Maurice listens politely, but with no very great interest. It seems to him that all that happened in the remote and shadowy past. But let *him* talk—listen to *him*—and we hear the names of newly-rising stars from lips that only a short time ago were in the nursery. Not that these old has-beens of ours haven't still their uses. They mayn't play any more, but they have the shrewdness and the experience. They coach, train, encourage, advise. But Maurice knows the Shrewsburys and Graces of to-morrow. He and his kind are the fresh springing crop that makes glad the land. And whatever soil we have left untilled, this, for good reasons and bad, we cultivate. The good far outweighs the bad. The bad are obvious, and so matter the less. Too many people make money out of it all. Too many people have other uses for it all. Let that pass. Even in spectatorship there is a gladdening unanimity. In what other way can you get five thousand or ten thousand people to think the same thought, instantaneously and as one man? An attentive silence reigns at the Oval or wherever it may be. The ball is delivered. Smack! It was too hot to hold, but not a man there but knows precisely what the effort consisted of, how lightning-swift was the thought, and which of the catcher's fingers will be aching to-morrow. Or the bowler has the batsman guessing. In the nick of time he

changes his mind, and the ball travels a bare yard. A titter goes round—"He didn't know what to do with that!" Or somebody else tries to appear to be making an attempt, but is really thinking of his hands or his shin or his head. The universal monosyllabic laugh tells that his inmost thought has been read. And then the roar—"Got him!" There is no room for dissimulation in all this. All is glassy clear in the very moment of its happening. The good and the bad in the player are equally known. And so there is unanimity and discipline in spectatorship too.

But it all meant a terrible lot of work for Maurice. For besides playing stand-off half in the winter and in the summer leading off with the bowling, he was Sports Secretary. It was Maurice who put that "*Chacey* 4 *for* 3" in the papers, and why shouldn't he? He had earned every letter of the story of it. Look at the work he did far into the night, the telephoning he did, the letters he wrote! If you think fifteen men can be got together ten minutes before scheduled time on a Victoria or Paddington platform by waving a wand you are mistaken. You don't know those harrowing moments when the train is due to start in another half-minute and two of your best men haven't turned up. You don't know the sickening suspense of not even knowing whether or not they have managed to scramble into the last coach after all. Why, for example, did the S. of M. go down so ignominiously before the Wasps—22 points to 3 ("*Chacey scored*")? Because they were without Philipson and Bell. Philipson played for the Harlequins too, and Bell for Blackheath. And remember, unless you can raise two fifteens of sorts it isn't easy to raise one at all. Fellows who don't get a regular game drop off and go somewhere else.

Then there are the railway bookings, and the arrangements at the other end, and the inclusion if possible of a man who can play football and the piano at the singsong afterwards as well. And all this has to be done in June for the winter, and in the winter for the following June. Fixture-cards don't fill themselves. And what about subscriptions and committee meetings, and smoothing things over when anything happened to disturb their harmony, and a hundred other matters? Maurice could have told you tales. . . . He did tell them. He told them by the hour together. Half of them would be Greek to you and me. We are whitening to a harvest that will put a stop to our playing once for all.

But this is the New Crop.

It was quite a presentable representative of To-morrow who entered the room, threw down his racket, and said, "Hallo, little Aunt Una! Say you're glad to see me!" His Byronic collar was open half-way down his breast, and the sun through the window he had left open haloed his rumpled hair and gave his flannels an outline of light. One of the knees of the flannels was cut across, and it was with his left hand that he waved himself welcome.

"What have you done to your hand, darling?" Mrs. Wyecastle asked.

"Nothing, grannie. Only jumping over the nettings and I slipped." (A week or two before he had picked up the affectation of the speech in "ings"; something else would probably have taken its place in another week.) "Got any foodings for a fellow, Aunt Una?"

He kept up the joke of their prospective relationship just to tease her. The third or fourth time he had repeated it she had given him a cold glance, as

much as to say, " Yes, I heard it the last time; can't you think of anything new? " She had remained stiffly polite; whereupon he had redoubled the " auntings." She was not going to say she was glad to see him. She thought him insufferably conceited, never stopping talking about himself and his doings, and saying " wending his weary way " and " hieing him " when he meant " go." And when, hardly interrupting himself, he sometimes interposed a grinning " I say, I seem to be doing all the talking, don't I? " and then rattled off a whole lot more, she could often have said ironically, " Oh no! We've hardly heard your voice yet! "

To-day he was even fuller of himself than usual. It was all about that job that the Mines Department had put up for competition. The brilliance of the *précis* he had sent in! His geology-paper, his paper on economics, his answers to the questions on Works-management! He had gone all out for the questions that would be productive of the highest marks; several of the fellows had funked them, but *he* hadn't! *Pas lui!* Jevons on Coal, what? And that snorter on the rigging of pumps? You wait till the results came out! Maurice was the fellow to show you how to get the jobbings!

But he needn't think he was impressing her. He was doing the exact opposite, if he must know! She sat there, ostentatiously not-listening. As for saying anything herself, there was no need for anybody to talk as long as *he* was in the room! She wished he would wend or hie or do something, if only he would go.

And when once more, without interrupting the flow, he gave her a confident glance and said " I know this is boring Aunt Una, only she's too polite to say so," she was on the very point of breaking out,

"Oh, you're quite mistaken, because Aunt Una as you call her (*neck!*) isn't listening to a word you say!"

"Rex is a little late," Mrs. Wyecastle remarked placidly, and added, as a not impossible explanation, "Perhaps he's been kept."

"——and then I'll take Aunt Una to the pictures——" the youth was saying.

All at once something unaccountable happened to Una Paull. It was as if a clinging, suffocating web fell suddenly away from her. And all at once it seemed to her that she had expected it to happen all along.

She wondered what she was doing in this house at all.

Not one shred of real happiness had its associations brought her. It seemed apart, stranded, out of the movement of things. First Kenneth Chacey had let her down and had then betaken himself out of her life. This tall stripling, his cousin, merely bored her. She had tried to unburden herself to old Mrs. Wyecastle, and had found her inaccessible. As for Rex——

She knew that for the first time she was face to face with the whole question of her engagement to him.

It seemed to have come about by means of his own family. The members of it had begun by being vague vignettes, with only Rex himself standing prominently forth. Now they were definitely in focus. She saw them as if she had been at a theatre, each of them individually lighted up—the heedless Kenneth, Rex elderly and staid, this high-and-dry old lady in the black and narrow white, this egregrious youth. They had popped on and off the stage on which she saw them, first one, then another. Now

the end of the play seemed to be drawing near. She saw them as it were taking their final call, hand in hand before a falling curtain. The very room seemed a stage-set, that the carpenters might take down and pack up into the tumbrils to-morrow. What had happened? She didn't know. She wished that Mrs. Wyecastle wasn't there. She wished this bare-necked boy would stop his chatter and wend. She didn't want Rex to come in. She wanted to be alone, with the scales fallen from her eyes and this new light all about her.

She tried to think it out clearly. She was engaged to Rex, but what was an engagement when you came to look into it? Surely it meant, or ought to have meant, that two people agreed to see quite a lot of one another for a bit, just to find out whether it was likely to be a success, and then, if it wasn't, to call it all off again. That was Winnie's idea. She liked Rex. She would never be sorry she had been engaged to him. But it struck her, dismayingly, and as it had never struck her before, that he was fifty.

Fifty! Oh yes, gentle and forbearing—but fifty! He didn't racket about like Kenneth or place himself in the middle of the limelight like this young man—because he was fifty! He was nice and kind-looking, wore his clothes well, was probably athletic out of them (supposing, with this Maurice-boy here, that she ever wanted to hear of athletics again)—but he was fifty!

It suddenly seemed a hundred at least.

And it wasn't as if there had been anybody else. She would have felt nervous about telling a man that she had changed her mind because she had found somebody she liked better. Men were very touchy about things like that, Winnie had said. So the

best reason for changing our minds—that there *is* somebody else—is the one we will last confess.

Maurice was still talking, something about somebody being the best place-kick with a muddy ball in England, and then about the motor-bike he intended to buy when he got his job.

"——and I'll take the little old Auntings up behind, what?" he said.

It was more than she could put up with just then. He "would" take her to the pictures, he "would" take her up on the bracket of his bike!

"Thank you, but I haven't seen you ride yet," she said icily; and the next moment hated herself for having answered him at all.

The mood of clear seeing grew on her. It passed from herself to others. If these were her own troubles, what were those of Mollie and Philippa and all the other girls she knew? Mollie and Philippa had their careers. The one was going to be a doctor, the other a sculptor. That was settled whether they ever got married or not. Their husbands, supposing they ever wanted husbands, would have to make up their minds to that—Winnie said so. As a matter of fact neither of them was very keen on marrying anybody just at present. It was just as Winnie said: the world about them was a sort of arena. It wasn't necessarily for strife; not particularly for anything at all. It was just for—general purposes. A cloud of youths in white flannels or plus-fours moved about one end of it, and at the other end was what she had once heard a man call the bobbed-hair brigade—all the Unas and Philippas and Mollies, in their blouses or smocks or surgical jackets or whatever else it might be. And they did not advance towards one another and pair off in couples to the ringing of bells, as in the old days. They had a good look at one

another, and if they didn't like one they passed to the next, and as many as they pleased. Winnie had told her all this. Lots of them mightn't get married at all, but just live together, Winnie had said. Babies? Winnie had thought of that too. According to Winnie, people would be considered married when they had babies, legitimate or otherwise, and if they hadn't babies they would not be considered to be married, whatever form or ceremony they had been through.

And as regarded money, young men and young women would pull their weight equally, fifty-fifty, and both would be independent.

"——and oh, who do you think blew in at the Coll the other day?" Maurice rambled cheerfully on to his grandmother. "Old Kenneth! 'Mind your eye, chaps,' I told them, 'this fellow's a D.S.O.!' And now I must go and change into some other bags while Aunt Una mends these—I'm taking out something *most* beautiful to behold this evening——"

Una gave a most unladylike snort. Do his mending for him indeed!

Well, if this creature, so pleasant to behold, whom he was taking out that evening, found any entertainment in his conversation, she was welcome to it. It didn't amuse Una one bit.

VI

NINI

Although he had a car, the country saw very little of Kenneth. Lately he had begun to take Par-par out rather less frequently. He had a sort of idea that she might be getting just a bit too fond of him, and that was exactly what he didn't want. A bit of fun once in a while, but he intended to stop at that.

Therefore the two-seater passed a large portion of its time waiting for its driver at West End kerbs. It saved thinking to go over the same ground again and again and at much the same hours of the day. He hated the effort of making up his mind what to do and where to go. It was more amusing to watch the activities of others, with his hands in his pockets and a thin cigarette in his mouth. If he couldn't do what he wanted he would do nothing at all. He could always spend an untroubled half-hour watching the blackboard in Holborn. There was another place of much the same kind that he knew of, at the very top of a tall building near Bond Street. It consisted of two rooms, with a communicating hatch between them to save walking out of one door and in at the next. In the outer room were a few sofas and a tape-machine that whirred and clicked intermittently, now a burst of clicking, then a short silence, and another burst. Occasionally a man would rise from a sofa, scan a yard or two of the tape, hand in his bet or give it to a page, and return to the sofa.

This was in the outer room. In the inner one, half a dozen telephones stood on a table before as many clerks, and at intervals there would come gusts of furious activity, when all the telephones broke out at once. Between these two rooms Kenneth frequently moved. He had no connection with the firm; he merely made himself gratuitously useful out of mere inoccupation. He took messages, read out from the tape, pinned up strips of paper on a baize board. Or there were offices he knew, upstairs over shops or underground in Arcades, where a cup of tea or what-else could usually be obtained. Or there was always the likelihood that he would meet somebody in the street going somewhere on business, who would take him along. He had even called on his cousin at his College for no reason at all except that, finding himself in the neighbourhood, it was easier to look up Maurice than anybody else. He supposed he would have to take himself in hand when his remaining money, about thirty pounds, came to an end, but that was not yet. He did not believe in troubling trouble till trouble troubled him.

Apart from the secretaries or typists at the places he visited, he didn't trouble women much either. One of 'em, in fact, had rather put the wind up him. This was Winifred Harrowby. There was something hair-raising about that woman. Kenneth had had his escapades, plenty of 'em. He expected he would have a few more. But there had always been the understanding that they *were* escapades, and did not affect the fundamental general position. There were things that every fellow did, and there were also certain other things that simply were not done. But this Harrowby woman seemed able to toss off frightful hypotheses without turning a hair. For example, she seemed to take it in her stride that Kenneth, or

fellows like Kenneth, were to dangle round the petticoats of the pretty wives of the old men who had the money. "A whole generation of young men too hard-up to marry and they don't know what to do about it! What always did happen? What always will happen?" she had mocked him. . . . No, that was altogether too much for Kenneth. A joke with a typist once in a while or the girl who sold you a pair of gloves—Par-par to the Palais de Danse at Hammersmith and no harm done as long as she didn't fall in love with him—that was the safer line. Anything else was asking for trouble.

On an idle afternoon he slowed down the car before a dancing-place near Oxford Street and sat with his engine softly running, wondering whether a fellow he knew was still there. As he waited a young woman came out. She glanced round in passing, and their eyes met. She smiled.

"Bon jour, M'sieu'," she said.

He looked again. It was the little Frenchwoman with the osprey feather and the in-and-out shoulders who had given his uncle dancing-lessons.

"Hallo, what are you doing here?" he asked.

The shoulders of her fur coat were hunched momentarily up.

"I do as always—ver' little," was the reply.

"You no mak-a da mon'sh?"

"I do not understand."

"Jump in. Which way?"

He opened the door for her and she sat down by his side. "What about a spot of tea first?" he said.

He used the word "first" because if she, like himself, had nothing to do, two might do it more amusingly than one. Taking Par-par out was always like taking a bit of the Hôtel Maeterlinck with him,

and these foreigners either had or seemed to have a vivacity that their English sisters lacked. Anything for a change. So he drew up at a shabby-magnificent place not far away, and, vis-à-vis with her in the vast empty room set half for tea and half for dinner, asked her news.

She gave it to him with pursings of her mouth, quick rovings of her eyes, and expressive hands that helped out her broken speech. Under the fur coat he could see that the shoulders still played peep and had to be put back again. She had (she said) private pupils of her own, but the plural only just saved its bacon. She had, to be exact, two. One of them was still taking lessons in order that he might dance with his daughter, and the other was jealous of his wife. Sometimes they kept their appointments and sometimes they did not. She had waited for an hour and a half that afternoon and neither of them had appeared. They paid her half-a-guinea a lesson, but out of the half-guinea she had to pay six-and-six for the use of the club. Her last unbroken half-guinea had been from Rex himself, because she had given him his lesson at his own home. Therefore eight shillings which she should have had that day she had not.

Then something in the way in which she dusted the crumbs of the last bit of cake from her fingers struck Kenneth. He suddenly turned.

"Waiter!" he called.

She was hungry.

"A large plate of anchovies on toast, and as hot as you can make 'em," he ordered.

She protested, her hand making quick little tugs at his sleeve.

"No, no——"

"And some fresh tea," Kenneth ordered. Then,

turning again to her, "When did you last eat?" he demanded.

"I had a cup of tea in bed. I do not dance again till midnight. I take something home to eat."

"All right, I'll run you along presently. Now go on with the news."

But she had probably exhausted as much of it as concerned him. Kenneth watched the conversing hands. He considered the nails just a little over-pointed, and the twisted ring of gold on the middle finger might mean anything or nothing. He wondered who had given it to her. She went in the evenings (she told him) to the club where he had found her, but was not retained there, and so was free to go to other clubs also. Possibly (he thought) she might get a small commission on the wine she induced her partners, whoever they might be, to buy. Any number of things about her were possible. He did not wonder whether certain of them were probable. It wasn't his business. His business was that the poor kid was hungry and had to be fed.

"I could not eat any more—I could not," she protested over the last piece of anchovy toast. He had wanted to order more. From the quantity that had been brought Kenneth believed her.

In one sense, there was little enough merit in his kindly act. It was as desultory as everything else he did; whoever it had been he would probably have done the same. Just as he threw street-musicians coins for luck, but for his own luck as much as for theirs—just so he befriended her. For all he knew it might be a propitiation of whatever gods were in charge of his own morrow.

But he had reckoned without her. Even during her hungrily-eaten meal her eyes had given a side-long little turn whenever a foot had passed, though

it had been only a waiter's. Now they were downcast on her empty plate, and the over-manicured fingers worked slightly. She lifted the eyes.

"I t'ank you ver' much," she said.

Because he felt a trifle awkward he was bright to excess. "Right!" he said, beckoning to the waiter.

"I t'ank you ver' much indeed," she repeated, her eyes on the table again.

"Well, suppose we move along?"

"Where?"

"I was going to drive you home."

"I come out again in the evening."

"What time?"

She came out again at eleven, she said. She then danced till three or four o'clock, and either rested in the club or else took a walk till the starting of the trains to Queen's Road or Notting Hill Gate. Sometimes she walked all the way. Then she rested till twelve or one, and began again.

"Anyway you aren't walking this trip," he said. "In you get——"

He put her into the car, and they threaded their way along Oxford Street and the north side of the Park. Then he had to ask her the way.

"You turn to the right, and leave me at the corner," she said.

"I'm going to take you all the way."

She laughed a little.

"They will think I have accident that I come home in a car," she laughed. And then, with the disconcerting simplicity of her race and its readiness to speak of things which we others hide in reserve, "It is a ver' cheap house, but it is comfortable inside—perhaps you think shabby after your Boys' Room——"

"After what? I don't live there."

"But he is your uncle?"

"Oh, I live at an hotel of sorts."

She directed him to a widish street of dingy brick houses, only one or two of which were more than two stories high. Judging from the activities that went on there it ought to have been the cleanest street in London, which it was not. Kenneth scanned the cards in the windows as he passed—"Dry-cleaning Done Here," "Furs Renovated," "Windows Cleaned by Contract," "The Powis Laundry." A man played a barrel-organ, about which a number of urchins danced. Every house seemed to eke out its domesticity by means of some hopelessly minor enterprise—photographic development, best prices for second-hand clothing, or a light cart for hire. Mademoiselle's abode was two doors from the Powis Laundry. It did plain sewing. A sagging old clothes-line stretched from corner to corner of the diminutive plot in front of it, and children had knocked off the cast-iron spear-heads from the gate at which Kenneth stopped.

"T'ank you so much again," said Mademoiselle Chevallière once more.

But as Kenneth took her hand he suddenly remembered something.

"Here, I say—you were going to take something in for dinner," he said.

She vowed that she could not eat any more. That he made short work of.

"That's no good. You girls never will eat. That's why you're always having nervous breakdowns. A few sandwiches won't keep you going at your job—I happen to know about dancing. How much money have you got?"

He made her tell him. She had three-and-sixpence. He opened the door of the car again.

"Get in," he ordered her; and in she had to get.

The car retraced its way through the back streets of Notting Hill Gate and back again towards Queen's Road.

He had thirty pounds, but there was more in his act than that sort of luck-insurance against the day when once more he should have nothing at all. It was not even altogether the demoralizing way in which he passed his days. Talking to her had rekindled his project for the dancing club once more. Blythe and Garstin declared that the money could still be found. Only the lack of suitable premises kept everything back. And here was an instructress in a thousand. It was damnable luck.

His project still possessed him as he danced with her that night—but only on the express understanding that if she found a paying-partner she left his arm at once. They had dined somewhere in Greek Street, and she had protested, as if it gave her physical suffering, against the amount of money he spent. Afterwards they had sat in a brasserie, and, when that had closed, had spent an hour, until the opening of the club, in a place where coffee, if nothing else, could be obtained.

"Ev-ery min-ute you sit down in the West End it cost you money!" she had cried with excruciating gestures of her hands. "It is *effrayant!* To-night already you spend one pound and half-a-crown and a lot of pence! You never pick up the pence! And there is a waiter yet to tip!"

"Come, we must have dinner, you know," Kenneth had laughed.

"Oh, you English, you must always have your dinnaire! You eat because it is your dinnaire-time! It ees *not* necessaire! One eats to live! You give—gave—me food when I was hungry, so why do you

give me more food when I have no appetite? It would do for to-morrow!"

"That's where you French make the mistake, my dear," he had answered her philosophically. "You don't take things easy enough."

"Oh, you take them too easy!"

"Well, I don't quite see the point in riding up and down in the tube for two or three hours to kill time. What do you usually do with yourself about this time?"

But he suddenly held his peace. As she had said, to drift about the West End cost money every moment of the time—to men. What harvests women reaped there he had only to look about him to see.

The dancing-place in which they found themselves differed hardly at all from a score of others that had sprung up since a process of decentralization had doubled the work of the police by closing certain promenades. Each of them was precisely what it was, strictly on its own merits. This particular one consisted of the whole of a four-storied house—five if the basement was included—in a dimly-lighted side-street in Soho. The conditions on which one became a member varied rather remarkably. Say that you were a stranger to the place. You entered by an ordinary street-door and stood for a moment looking about you, past the men, not all of them in evening clothes, who stood about doing nothing in particular. You saw a thickly carpeted passage with cloak-rooms on one side of it leading to the bright dancing-room beyond. Then a voice close to your ear came from an inconspicuous little box-office that you hadn't noticed.

"Yes? . . . One guinea, please."

You or I, eager to learn as much as we can about these times we live in, would no doubt have paid the

guinea without further ado. But seldom was that guinea obtained. Another man would come along, wiser than you or I. The chances were he would never be asked a guinea, but if this did happen he would give a stare, half of incredulity and the other half of contempt. "What do you think I am—a copper's nark?" might conceivably be his expression. Then half a guinea sufficed.

Even this was capable of further reduction. The candidate for membership of the club might happen to enter at the same moment as a lady, none of his acquaintance. The rest depended on the smile of the lady and her fractional nod in the direction of the guichet. Two were then admitted for the price of one. In short, there are twenty other ways of bluffing the whole thing. You and I do not know them, but there are those gifted with personality who do. And whether we pay a guinea or half a guinea or nothing at all, we are better somewhere else.

Kenneth had danced with Mademoiselle Chevallière, and the mere perfection of the wedded rhythm of their steps had completed his unsettlement. He sighed as he thought of that club of his. It would not have been a place like this, liable, as half a glance had told him, to police-visits at any moment. It would not have been open to anyone who could stare his way in, or haunted by women whom the twinkling of an eye disposed of, or horribly full of men who did not even pretend to be dancing. Whether the people who came to his club would be any better than these was not Kenneth's business. His business would be that they should seem to be better, dressed in frocks they never wore twice, with Rolls-Royces to park outside in the Square, and ropes of pedigree pearls, and money, money, money to burn! He believed himself to be capable of running

such a show. What then did it matter to him that dancing was a mere luxury-trade, that neither swelled the trade-returns of his country nor helped in the re-establishment of the economic position of Europe? Kenneth knew nothing about these things. The only world Kenneth cared about was his own world. The life that most interested him was his own life. His life had been anybody's. Now it was his own again. The other things were Rex's business.

And now in his mind existed a club, but outside his mind there was nowhere to put it.

Damnable luck!

"Can I have a look round?" he said suddenly to Mademoiselle Chevallière. "And I say, I can't go on calling you Mademoiselle—I'm going to call you Nini."

They passed from the dancing-room on the ground floor to the lounge above.

At the first thing that met his eyes Kenneth's mouth tightened. A nigger, by Gosh! And, of course, with the most flaxen-haired little girl in the place! (By the way, the nigger was not a negro at all, but probably an Indian or Burmese; Kenneth took these things a little broadly.) And the flaxen curls over the girl's ears were actually moving to the fellow's whisperings! A couple of tables farther along sat other niggers (Japanese). Farther away still a wide-eyed girl in flimsy mauve was shaking the shoulder of a Hebrew-looking young man and hoarsely imploring him to wake up. The tables were wet and half full of coffee-cups and glasses, these last empty. As likely as not the place had no licence to sell drink, and even if it had the prohibited hours had been entered on long ago. Nevertheless a man entered with a couple of glasses of flat Bass in his hands.

"Where did he get those?" Kenneth demanded,

in a voice as authoritative as if he had owned the place.

"In the kitchen perhaps—but oh, *mon chèr*, do not spend more money!"

"Where's the kitchen?"

"Thees way."

They mounted to a floor higher still, into what appeared to be a large lumber-room, with packing-cases among broken old couches, chairs piled upon one another, and the frames of bedroom wash-stands, with their alabaster tops leaning against the wall. The end of the room at the stair-head had been cleared, and by the hatch of a service-lift two waiters quarrelled. The kitchen itself lay beyond. Its door opened, and there suddenly escaped loud sounds of frying and a babble of noisy voices. A glimpse of steamy brightness showed. It was just big enough for a table and a gas-stove, and it was full to suffocation with men and women. They sat on the edge of the table, on the rim of the greasy gas-stove where blue jets burned under a couple of bubbling kettles. Among them a perspiring woman pushed with a sizzling frying-pan in her hand, angrily asking to be let get on with her work.

"Please—please—oh, I've had enough of this! I'm off down to see the manager!"

"Cheerioh, chaps——"

"Two bacons and, that makes four!" bawled a waiter, putting his head in at the door.

"Mind my frock with that pan, you——"

"Three Basses, mother——"

"After you with the corkscrew——"

Hiss, sizzle, spit from the pan—a gurgle as a kettle boiled over on the stove——

Kenneth shut the door of the kitchen again and the noise died almost away.

"My God, what a place!" he thought. Shades of the Embassy and the Hyde Park! Once in a while, perhaps a legitimate party might unknowingly drift in here, from a theatre, dance, pay a staggering price for a bottle of champagne, and depart again; but the rest were of the underworld—leaden-eyed young men who walked on in revues, young men whose shuffling of a pack of cards bade you beware, young men who had understandings with young women, young women who never got out of bed till four in the afternoon, suspects a street's-length away, Greeks, harpies, goers-between. These were the places to which those who had failed to keep afloat descended—those young men who had made the miscalculation about the functions of the Matrimonial Agency, those other young men who had not known that the easiest way of forging a signature is to do it in a mirror, and those again who had been touched on the shoulder with the little cachets of the powdered White Death upon their persons. Here they had their nocturnal respite, between a sentence and a sentence. None of it was new to Kenneth. He might meet somebody he had once known there. But on the whole he would rather have seen them decently shot.

They had descended to the supper-room in the basement. At one end of it was a cold buffet, and the lift ran up to the door of the drinking-kitchen four floors above. On the stairs as they descended a couple of men had given Nini a casually familiar nod. She led him to a secluded corner, but it was already occupied, and they ascended to the dancing-room again.

It had filled up, and its whole aspect had changed. A revolving coloured disc up in a gallery stained everything with wavering floods of green and orange

and morbid purple light. Under its alternations the dancers turned, as if under an all-evil eye, of which the several component wickednesses declared themselves spectrum-wise one after another. Heads were inky blots rising from violently-illuminated shoulders, black hair was ashen, yellow hair a tormented green. Frocks, from blonde to black, seemed to change colour of themselves. They danced, breast to breast, face to face, with hands that left their imprints on naked shoulders. And, as Kenneth and Nini sat at a little round table, watching, there darted forth from it all a young man, none too sober, his hair fallen over one eye, and his black bow up at the top of his collar, who seized Nini by both hands and tried to drag her into the kaleidoscope of flying light.

"'llo, Nini!" he cried. . . . "Hoi, wha's the matter with *you?*"

For Kenneth had pushed his chair aside and stood between them.

"Wha'? I'm to 'op it, am I?"

"Yes," said Kenneth.

"Oh, I am, am I? And who the——"

But at that moment there started out from that pyrotechnic background a gaunt young woman, who took the intruder in both her arms.

"Come along out of it, Eddie—you're as tight as a handcart——"

With several glares behind him, the young man suffered himself to be dragged away. The lights went up again, relieving the fatigued eye. But Kenneth sat silent, his fingers drumming softly under the edge of the round table.

He had told her plainly that if she saw a chance of a paying partner she was to leave him at once. And with her living to earn she could not afford to pick and choose. But a bounder like that! A cad who

had probably backed a winner and wanted to buy drinks for the first crowd of strangers he met in a bar! She oughtn't to have been there. She wasn't a bad little sort really. He had better get her away and tell her not to come here again. There were plenty of other places, where the kitchen was not turned into a drinking-den. He no more wanted her to be in at a raid than he wanted to be in at one himself. He had the car outside. He had better drive her straight home.

But as he was about to rise he checked himself. What was he thinking of? Where were his eyes? She seemed perfectly at home here. Apparently she knew the place from cellar to attic, knew its most secluded sitting-out corners, knew where drink was served out of hours. She was nodded to by men on the stairs, seized by a pig of a fellow who called her by her name. She had eyes that couldn't help rolling, a foot that couldn't keep still. The gesture with which she tucked in first one round shoulder and then the other was unvarying, automatic. He knew nothing whatever about her, except that he had found her hungry and had given her something to eat.

Something to eat—not something to drink. Kenneth couldn't have told you the difference, but he felt that there was a difference somewhere. He was not in the habit of chucking the weight of his compassion about. Buy one of these girls a drink and you would be given the Christian names of a couple of her friends, and that meant four drinks if you included your own. Give 'em a note to pay their rent with and you would instantly be asked for another. Their insatiability put all question of sentiment aside. The poor may help the poor, but they are not going to be humbugged by the poor.

But food! Food went plumb to the very bottom

of human need. Even a loaf-snatcher was sometimes let off with a caution and given something out of the missionary-box to be going on with. He had given her a few anchovy sandwiches, which she had eaten to the last crumb, and she had hardly been able to eat her dinner afterwards for the thought that it would have tided her on for another couple of days. Poor little devil! She would rather have had the money. Then look at the dodging to which she was reduced merely in order to get home to her bed! To doze on one of those couches upstairs or else to walk about till the first trains began to run—'strewth, what a life! No wonder she looked tired!

And tired as she was, she was still ready to make play with the eyes that were dropping with sleep. For the moment their looks were for him, but how if he had not been there? If he were to rise and leave now, would it be five minutes before some other man had taken his place?

And why shouldn't another man take his place? What concern was it of Kenneth's?

But he saw her eating those anchovy sandwiches again, so hungrily that he had had to turn his eyes away.

And she had three-and-sixpence in her pocket, and ten to one owed money to the landlady who did the plain sewing two doors from the Powis Laundry!

What a life!

He pushed back his chair and yawned.

"What about getting a move on?" he said.

"You will drive me home? Eet ees so nice not to walk."

"Yes. Let's get out of this."

Outside the day was breaking slate-grey. Even the London air tasted fresh and sweet. It was long now since Kenneth had seen a sunrise. He never

wanted to see one again. In the two-seater he felt the pressure of her shoulder against his own. They passed Queen's Road and turned into Powis Street as the lamps went suddenly out. They drew up at the gate from which the iron spear-heads had been knocked. She stood with her hand in his.

"I t'ank you *ver'* much," she said once more, in a touched voice. "Nobody 'ave ever treated me so."

"That's all right, kiddie."

"I see you again soon?"

"Oh, I expect so."

"To-morrow—non?"

"I'm not so sure about to-morrow. But I'll fetch you one day."

"I shall wait in every day till five o'clock."

"No, don't do that——"

"I shall, every day."

There was a pulpy little tremor on her lips. He was afraid she wanted him to kiss her. But instead she lifted the hand that was still in hers and kissed that.

"You 'ave been so good," she murmured. "Nobody 'ave ever been so good to me."

He left her quickly. Only when he was half-way to the Maeterlinck did he remember that he had omitted to tell her that she mustn't go any more to the club where they served drinks in the kitchen.

VII

A DEPARTMENTALIST DOUBTS

Rex Wyecastle sat in the billiard-room of his club, alone. It was a sociable sort of club, the members of which chatted to one another whether they were particularly well acquainted or not, but Rex had lunched that day at a small table, apart. Now the chess-players he had been pretending to watch had finished their game and departed. The cues had been put back into their japanned sheaths, and the balls stood motionless on the table in the empty room. All but he had gone about their afternoon affairs. But he still sat.

He could have gone upstairs to the pleasant bay that overlooked the Green Park, but he preferred the solitude of this back room. His shoulders were deep in the leather couch, and his legs would have sprawled in the way of the club waiters, had they not also departed. His very figure did not seem that of the competent official who had stood on hearthrugs, had rung for dossiers, and had waved his callers to the visitors' chair.

Remember he was only a temporary official, not born to the purple of the Civil Service. He was one of a number who had been kept on, preferred to others for the sound public reason that there are two sides to a job—the personal claims of the candidate, and the requirements of the job itself. Because in the long run the latter must be paramount, Rex had

found strong backing. His chiefs had stood by him, and, unless he made some signal *faux-pas*, only with his own consent was he likely to be turned out.

But there were many who coveted his chair. Among them were what might be called the officially-officials, sincere, hard-working men, skilled in the exploring of avenues, the finding of formulæ, and all the other necessary things that must be done before conflicting opinions can be reconciled and anything at all achieved. And, as he reclined laxly there, he knew that he was asking himself a question that might mean the end of his public service.

In the days when he had been a modest landed proprietor in Herefordshire the well-being of a few score of people had been dependent on his word. He had taken his responsibilities seriously and by the book—biblically even, for he had ever dealt justly and uprightly and patriarchally. He had dispensed even-handed justice from the Bench. He had read the lessons in the old ivied church of a Sunday morning, in a quiet, carrying voice, so that a pin could have been heard to drop. He had received his tenants' rent in the old gun-room in a spirit of feudality modified to suit modern requirements, and had not forgotten the spread in the swept-out barn afterwards, of beef and beer and a drop of something warmer. On the local tribunal he had scrupulously weighed the claims of married and single, children and dependents. Just, able and honest to the last fibre of his soul. No wonder they had asked him to doff his khaki and to accept a post of responsibility at the Organization Office. Government has many important uses for those who realize that, while a spirit of goodness and tenderness of heart for the individual must inform the whole, even-handed

dealing between man and man is the arduous and immediate business.

And then Una had come into his life, and everything had been changed. It had not only been changed to beauty by the depth of his love. That went without saying. It had changed in a hundred practical particulars too. She had her own ideas. She intended to do this, did not intend to do that. And first he had smiled at her naïve and innocent betrayals, and then had frowned again, remembering Winifred Harrowby. It must be his task to help things to settle themselves. A guiding touch here and there, a deferentially-expressed wish once in a while, and all was to have run smoothly. She was to have adapted herself imperceptibly to the pattern of his own life. As for her headstrong intention of going into business, even that was not to have lasted very long after she had had a taste of what business and the world really were.

But now, sitting alone in the billiard-room of his club, he realized that events were not working themselves out on those lines at all. She might not be altogether happy in her job—she had confessed a number of her minor worries to him—but she had no intention of giving it up unless for another one. And one other disturbing thing she had done, which seemed to show that, far from her will being subject to his wise guidance, his might have to be the will to submit.

"You're bound to be running into her," she had said when, to all intents and purposes, she had told him that if he wanted her he must take her job too. "If you think like that about her it wouldn't work for a week, and it would be foolish to go on."

Well, time had proved her right. It had not been possible to treat Mrs. Harrowby as though she did

not exist. He could not ring Una up on the telephone and be sure that the older woman's voice would not reply. He could not call to take her out to lunch and be certain that he would not run into Mrs. Harrowby in the office or on the stairs. Three, four times he had so met her. And to meet a woman on her own staircase is necessarily to greet her.

"And it's beastly when you stand there as stiff as a poker saying it's a fine day and waiting for me to put my hat on," Una had said crossly one day. "I told you it wasn't going to work, and it isn't working."

"But my darling girl——"

"And you needn't think she hasn't noticed it, because she has. You call there for me, and she's always nice to you, but you haven't once asked her round to your house."

He had seen what was coming. He had given a deep sigh that apparently there was no escape from it.

"Would it make you any happier if I did, darling?"

"Well, I shouldn't like to be always at a person's place and never having them at mine!" she had replied.

He had sighed again. Very well——

So once Mrs. Harrowby had been asked to tea, and once she, Mrs. Wyecastle, Una and Rex had dined together *en partie carrée*, rather feverishly brightly, and with never a moment's pause in the conversation.

Just so you and I, individually, together, or with all our fellows about us, Rex, Kenneth or whoever it may be, find ourselves driven to deal with each occasion as it arises, in the humble hope that when all is over we shall not have committed more than our share of blunders.

And then, in the very moment when he had thought he had arrived at a working compromise, that other too, too familiar figure had intruded—the figure of his nephew. Many papers came before Rex that had to do with the position of women in this our modern economy, and whenever he read these the image before his eyes was the image of Una Paull. Many papers came before him that had to do with still other plans, and then the image was the image of Kenneth Chacey. Kenneth—and Una! More and more these two had come to stand for the rest, were now the touchstone by means of which all the rest was to be tested. If Kenneth and Una said to Rex that all was well, then all was well. If they said "No," then all was to begin again. It made no difference that Una was an inexperienced child in waters too deep for her, Kenneth a good-humoured vagabond who had been offered job after job and had failed in them all. There they had placed themselves and there they obstinately remained, wreaking their reactions on Rex. All the departmentalist in him clung desperately to numbers, any number large enough on which to base an average that might correspond with nobody, but was as near as could be attained by human wit. These two were real.

And all the time he knew that his conclusion lacked proportion and balance. Una could no more stand for the whole of young womanhood than Kenneth could claim to have won the war single-handed. On the other hand, his daily work seemed altogether too balanced. Not all, perhaps not the greater part, but far too much of the whole elaborate machine seemed to be working for its own sake rather than for anything outside it. Things were in the saddle and rode mankind. Too many programmes were

constructed of outworn elements, the attempts to apply them, already too often a failure, must soon manifestly fail. There seemed little more hope of the youngest party than of the oldest. The coherence that, during the whole of his life, Rex had never questioned, had gone, and something new and strange and still invisible had come to take its place.

And what then? Good man as he was, Rex Wyecastle was no visionary. It was necessary that he should know exactly where he, his Department, and other Departments stood. He was not ignorant of England nor of her way of doing things. He did not believe that England had been invented for nothing. Sometimes he almost saw his way through to brightness again. Looked at on the surface, all those somewhat hurriedly-conceived schemes for England's reconstruction often seemed sad reading. They had borne so little fruit yet. Those sixteen vast power-stations were still unconstructed, the tidal experiments were still experiments, nothing had been done about the canals. The railways had been grouped, but the acquisition of land proposals were still in abeyance. Something had been done, but first one thing had had necessarily to be postponed, then something else shelved for the moment. Interests still contended, putting pressure upon the Departments, which, until the difference was settled, could do little or nothing. All this was on the surface, and Rex knew it all backwards. But he also knew that beneath the surface all had *not* been wasted. Even so short a time as the few intervening years had been enough to show that in those days enthusiasm had a little been allowed to get the upper hand. That might have been a fault, but it was a fault in an honest direction. And the schemes were still there, not only good in themselves, but of the

very last public value. They were applicable the moment things settled down a bit.

Yet the new forces were still there, too, and Rex sometimes wondered whether one or two of his colleagues, spending as much time as they did in walking along carpeted corridors to hushed committee-rooms, were in the best position to estimate their value and direction. Perhaps they didn't get about enough; perhaps he himself had not been about enough. Some of them even seemed to lull themselves, or else were the possessors of two minds, one for the facts and the other for appearances. There are good and bad in every fold, even in the Departments. And there were also the in-betweens. Holmes, for example, who did much of Rex's press-work, was one of the in-betweens. Rex had real uses for the newspapers, as the newspapers had real uses for Rex, but the result was sometimes a little equivocal. Newspapers were indispensable channels for the disclosure of things done, of things proposed to be done, sometimes of things desired to be done of which the public reception remained in some doubt. And they had another function, also thoroughly legitimate and from every point of view desirable—that of utter and complete ignoring. That also Rex was prepared to defend. But the other side of the picture? Once more Rex doubted, without taking it too seriously however. Beauty Competitions did nobody any real harm. Pictures of young women taking the first dip of the season did nobody any harm. No harm was done by Mannequin Parades nor society weddings or engagements. Nobody was really much worse off when, looking at a picture they took to be of a current event, they found it to be a film. Even the more fatuous things were in the main harmless—actress's pekes, people

who went round the world in a wheelbarrow or over Niagara in a barrel, Pip, Squeak, Wilfred, Mutt, Jeff. And sport above all things was indispensable—golf, cricket, football, racing—Lord's and the Oval and Hurlingham and Stamford Bridge—Hayes, Hitch and Hobbs, an all-England team of H's, and Hearne getting Macaulay through the slips, with the telephotographed batsman, wicket-keeper, umpire and spectators all closed up on a square yard or two of ground. People must be given these things in order that Rex and his fellows might be allowed to get on with the more delicate negotiations, that cannot be decided by a show of a million hands. Rex had far greater things on his mind than trifles like these.

But still he doubted. All this had been going on for years, and nothing can go on for years unchanged nowadays. They seemed to persist very largely because they had once served a useful purpose and nobody had thought of anything else since. One cannot indefinitely continue to set one half of the population to keep the other half from thinking. It seemed to Rex that the whole thing was being overdone, and that, by their sheer unwieldiness, things were defeating men.

Now only one thing can defeat a thing. It is an idea.

And Rex hadn't got one.

And in that case, and supposing that Kenneth wanted to start a dancing-club, what was he doing more than one or two others Rex could have named were doing?

Look at it as he would, turn it this way or turn it that, it all seemed to lead back to Kenneth—to Kenneth and Una. The worst system in the world, provided it took proper account of these, would not

utterly fail. The best, ignoring them, was doomed. Rex saw no other conclusion.

His thought strayed back to Una again.

That had been a curious dinner that he, his mother, Una and Winifred Harrowby had shared. Like his own daily labours, it had been full of cross-currents and movements beneath the surface. He had an idea that his guest had enjoyed every moment of its complexity. And, if the promptitude with which she had paid her subsequent call meant anything, she was coming again. Rex was no quicker than most men to notice what women wore, but there had been something about Winifred Harrowby's very dress that had been subtly challenging. Probably fifty guineas would not have bought that film of black lace that had veiled her undeniably shapely arms and back. He had wondered what the material was, that it should so make everything else seem a shade inferior by comparison. Mrs. Wyecastle's unvarying black had looked like serge, Una's own blonde georgette (if that was the right name for it) might almost have been worn by a young girl at a Sunday School treat. Perhaps it was that " aura " on which she traded for her living. The old leather chairs, knocked about by five generations, had suddenly had a come-down-in-the-world look. The lace mats had shown broken and thready, hot-pressed and filled in with many visits to the laundry. And the more splendid clothes still that she had left at home had seemed to drape her ten times over.

Nobody would have dreamed that she sat at the table of the man who had lent her husband money in order to divorce her. Her manner had been charm itself. She had flattered Mrs. Wyecastle on her

appearance—" like a Van Dyck ! "—and the old lady had smiled and bloomed and lived her youth again. Rex remembered the talk as he sat there in the billiard-room of his club, numbed and relaxed. Temple Hazard, the old field-paths, the woods, the hills, the noble river—so it had run; and Rex had been deeply moved to see his mother, straying once more among the flowery boughs of her Spring. Then, with gentle authority and none to contradict her, Mrs. Wyecastle herself had taken up the tale, going back farther still, to people and places that only she herself remembered. She had forgotten Mrs. Harrowby's divorce as completely as she had forgotten the rest of her middle years.

And what (Rex asked himself) had that divorce been after all? Doubting so much else, he was now unsure about that also. Our judgments become less harsh with the passing of time. Much was to be forgiven those who had lost their footing and slipped in the whirl and peril of those so recent yet so far-off times. If she had not thought fit to re-marry, that was her own affair. And seeing his mother so happy, he could almost have taken Winifred Harrowby by the hand and begged that bygones should be allowed to be bygones.

But—there had been Una. She had sat there, saying little; enough that it had been her will that had brought this reunion about. Yet had it been her will? Doubt, doubt, nothing but doubt! He knew the child's subservience to the older woman. She was dominated in all her wishes and ideas. What he himself had failed to do Winifred Harrowby had successfully accomplished, and he knew that were Winifred Harrowby to urge her in one direction he would pull in vain in the other. He feared her for this power. It should not have needed the goodwill

of Winifred Harrowby to enable him to keep what was innermost in his heart.

For she had made her way into his very heart, and who will call a man of fifty ridiculous that he has fallen in love with a child? Here and there he may meet a woman of his own generation, young despite her years. Happy he if he sees the imperishable beauty in her and marries her, for she will now never age. He can guess at her younger youth, and will seek among those sweet features for an earlier sweetness. It has been, and miraculously has not gone. But this is a rarity, whereas the beauty that lies all about us is sovereign in itself. To desire a woman is to desire a young woman, though he who desires go doublefold. And for this Rex had waited half a lifetime. It might take him ten minutes to brush his hair, but his capacity for worship was still a boy's. Now he trusted that a few weeks would bring her into his arms.

But once more his thoughts wandered. They wandered to a curious little incident that had occurred only a few days before. They had been discussing their future plans—that is to say he had, for Una had said little—and it had occurred to him to propose an inspection of the Kensington house, the upper parts of which she had not yet seen. So together they had ascended. Mrs. Wyecastle's bedroom was on the first floor in the front of the house; the room always had been hers. The remaining rooms on that floor were small, but, on the floor higher still, another bedroom corresponded exactly to Mrs. Wyecastle's.

"Of course my mother's most anxious to move," he had said a little nervously, standing with her in this upper room. "In fact she's quite obstinate about it—she made the suggestion immediately——"

To this Una had replied hurriedly that such a thing wasn't to be thought of, and he had lifted grateful eyes to her.

"I knew you'd say that," he had murmured. "It's so sweet and like you. Thank you, darling. You see, it will have to be this house, just at first at any rate, because of the lease and all the other complications——"

She had been looking round the room. It was a pleasant room, with a brightly-fitted bathroom adjoining, a tiny dressing-room beyond that, and a vast brass bedstead. He had continued.

"And you'll go to Warings or somewhere—get Mrs. Harrowby to advise you—I want you to have whatever you please—short of solid silver taps for the bathroom, of course," he had laughed.

Then she had spoken.

"It's very nice. And of course I shouldn't dream of disturbing your mother. But I'm afraid that dressing-room isn't big enough for a bed." And at that she had looked straight at him. "Which would be your room, Rex?"

He knew that times had changed. Their changing was an ever-present factor in his life, and for that reason he must learn all he could about them. He himself had proposed the tour of the house. But somehow he had found himself remembering those young women his mother would have liked him to marry. Any one of those would have taken a timid peep into the room, and would then have withdrawn again without betraying any knowledge that a bed existed at all. And there would have been a little thrill of maidenly sweetness about it all.

But Una had asked him outright where he was going to sleep.

Well, it was new—different, but better perhaps

in some ways—in some respects it had his complete approval—properly safe-guarded——

Then she had broken quite bluntly out.

"You see it wouldn't be my idea to be always in the same room together."

"No, no, no, no," he had hastened to murmur.

"Because that's only one bit of marriage after all. In fact people needn't get married at all for that. Lots of people——"

"Una!" he had exclaimed, shocked in spite of himself.

"It all turns on the babies, and whether you're going to have them straight away or later on——"

"My dearest!"

"Well, you may as well know what I think."

It was the Harrowby hand again——

They had left the bedroom and descended to the Boys' Room without another word.

His work, his love—the burden of his day—they oppressed him, seemed almost physically to drive him down deeper into the leather-covered seat of the billiard-room. In the event of a disaster to any of them he no more knew what he would do next than he knew where the motionless balls on the green cloth would come to rest when next they were struck. He, a prominent director of events, an important figure in the fashioning of a newer and a better Time, must begin all over at the beginning again. Humbly he must learn. It would be a heavy business, but it must be undertaken.

Sluggishly he rose. He told himself that something would turn up, some way out would open.

His duty, his love, the dead weight of his day——

And if, in some last event of all, no help came from outside, he must look for a courage within, among the dark questionings that besieged his soul.

VIII

THE POINT OF VIEW

In the ordinary course of nature Mrs. Wyecastle could not expect many more anniversaries of her birthday, and Kenneth, though he stayed away from the Kensington house for the whole of the rest of the year, on that day must be present. He must meet Una in the family circle some time. He needn't stay long. Best set his teeth and get it over.

That was the first of the concurrence of trivial chances on which, as on a pivot, all subsequently turned.

The next was even more stupidly casual. Because Mrs. Wyecastle happened to be slightly ailing, the whole celebration had to be postponed. This postponement involved a further accident. Rex, who was largely able to study his own convenience in the matter of hours, nevertheless had duties, and on the substituted day he had no choice but to advance luncheon by half an hour or so, to remain only for a short time afterwards, and then to depart.

The next of the fatal muddle was that Winifred Harrowby must needs drive Una up in her car. There was no reason why, on a purely family occasion, she should have been asked to remain, but Rex, ever nervous about Una's wishes on such points, had positively feared not to ask her. Nor need Winifred Harrowby have stayed. These are the accidents that beset our lives in all their formidable littleness,

giving, when all is over, the effect of a malign premeditation.

There was no true catastrophe. Catastrophe is the last perfection, not of life, but of a planned and ordered art. It brings its own peace, because there is nothing left to question. But no peace came of this meeting of Kenneth Chacey and Una Paull. Questions crowded on them. And to not one of the questions did there seem to be an answer.

No need to dwell on the fortuitousness of that birthday luncheon. Of those present, two only were unconscious of constraint—Mrs. Wyecastle herself and young Maurice. The large sheaf of birthday flowers in the centre of the table was interposed between Kenneth Chacey and Una Paull. Their eyes did not once meet. Kenneth sat next to his grandmother, and during the course of the meal he became aware of the gentle urgency of a hand at his knee beneath the table. A five-pound-note was being softly forced upon him. His first impulse, he couldn't have told why, was to refuse it, but in the end, with a glance of thanks to the equable old face, faintly flushed with the excitement of its tiny secret, he slipped the note into his pocket. A health was drunk, and Rex glanced at his watch. They descended to the Boys' Room for coffee. Una was returning to South Molton Street with Mrs. Harrowby in the car, and, as Rex's appointment was in another direction, the proffered lift was of no use to him. He packed his mother off for her afternoon rest, and returned. He lost a few minutes in artificial conversation, and then glanced at his watch again. He must go. Maurice had already left for his College. Rex took his leave, and in the Boys' Room Kenneth, Una and Winifred Harrowby stood together, their coffee-cups in their hands.

"Won't you have some more coffee?" said Kenneth to Mrs. Harrowby.

"No. Give Una some more; there's no hurry. I'm just going out to the car for a moment——"

She passed along the oaken gallery.

It was the one occurrence of the afternoon in which accident played no part. Kenneth and Una were left together.

He could hardly have done what he so much wished to do—walk out of the room and leave her standing there. So he filled in the moments until Mrs. Harrowby should return with casual remarks.

"I expect he's got a meeting or a committee of some sort."

She made no reply.

"You going on to your office?"

"Yes."

"Sure you won't have some more coffee?"

"No thanks."

"Then let me take your cup."

"Thanks."

"Grannie's looking pretty well."

It needed no reply, and it got none. There was another protracted silence. It was she who broke it.

"I wonder if she's having trouble with the car?"

"Shall I go and see?"

"Do you mind?"

Even had she accompanied him out the rest could never have happened. But as he stalked along the gallery without a glance behind him she did not move. She stood there, as she had stood before the Book of Brasses, turning her engagement-ring slowly upon her finger. Her eyes were not on the ring. They passed from one object to another of this room in which she had never been at her ease, never could be at her ease. She looked at the rods, the guns,

the cups, at the photographs of these young strangers that stood everywhere about. And then her eyes rested on a larger portrait. It was the portrait of Rex, in the spiny Cingalese frame that hung low by the side of the carved and pillared chimney-breast.

She moved slowly forward, looking at the enlarged photograph as if she had never seen it before.

Strangers to her, all strangers—and he was the greatest stranger of them all. This spurious room, set down in a back yard, oppressed her with the weight of other people's histories. To him it might represent what was left of an earlier and happier Time, but it had been his Time, not hers. She could have conceived herself as living in an army-hut or a creosoted temporary wooden building, but never, never here. And at the thought of that other room upstairs, with the adjoining dressing-room that was too small to contain a bed, she felt herself, for all the warmth of the afternoon, suddenly cold. To take this irrevocable step, not into newness and the future, but into all these alien past things! To turn her back on everything to come and to retire into this alien past life! Oh yes, marriage was give-and-take, interpenetration, merging; but that other merging, the unguessably beautiful gift of her body—oh, she had been able to contemplate it, to promise it, even to appear to take joy in the promise; but she knew that she could never do it! It would mean the descending of a black curtain on all her young dreaming for ever.

And all because of the dread of causing him pain, the lack of resolution in herself, and the want of a friend to guide!

Suddenly something slipped and dropped. She had not known how nervously her hands were working, but the ring had gone from her finger. It had

escaped between the thumb and finger of her other hand. She stooped to look where it had fallen. A small footstool stood beneath the framed photograph; she moved it. Then she dropped to her hands and knees.

She was in this position when a step was heard on the gallery, and Kenneth returned into the room.

"I say," he began, "she seems to have—what's the matter?"

She did not answer.

"Dropped something?" he asked.

"Yes. My ring."

"Be careful you don't tread on it."

He came down, approached, and began to peer about with her.

"Where were you?" he asked presently.

"Don't you bother."

"Sure it isn't anywhere about you? Shake yourself."

Two minutes passed, three. For all they could see of the ring it might have dropped through the solid parquet dancing-floor. And then all at once she rose.

This ended it. She had done with doubt and brooding and irresolution. She crossed to the sofa, took up her gloves, and began to draw them on.

"You needn't trouble," she said.

"But the thing can't have melted!"

"Is the car ready?"

He was still stooping, looking under a rug. At that he looked up.

"Eh? Oh! I was going to tell you, but you put it out of my head. She's gone!"

The girl turned quickly. "Who? Winnie?"

"Yes."

"But she's taking me back to the office!"

"Well, Edwards saw her drive off."

Una moved, and spoke over her shoulder. "Then you needn't see me out."

"But look here, what about your ring?" he asked, standing up.

"I'll see about that. It would have come some other way if it hadn't come this."

Kenneth stood open-mouthed.

"What do you mean? That you're chucking him?"

Her answer was a nod.

"But heavens alive! Just because you've——"

"Not just because of anything. Just because of everything. I've known for weeks it was a mistake, and I'm thankful this has happened. Good-bye——"

She gave him the words, but neither look nor hand with them. It might have been better not to give the words, for, as it happened, and as no Good-bye came from him in return, she seemed to stand on the little nicely, not leaving. So we do when we say a Good-bye against our own most deeply-secret wishes. We must be going—but we linger; there is nothing further to say—but we say the same thing over again. Love had come to shipwreck between them, but all was not over. The drifting wreckage remained. They stood as it were in the midst of it, looking at one another, hoping for nothing to come, but unable to turn their backs on what once had been.

"Good-bye," she said again coldly, but still without the hand.

"But look here!" he broke out. "You can't, you know! You just can't! You've no idea—you don't know him—he'll go all to pieces——"

She winced. "Don't——"

"And just for a silly superstition! The ring's somewhere——"

The words broke from her. "I wouldn't put it on again for a thousand pounds!"

"A what?" said Kenneth. "There isn't a thousand pounds. You sit down while I hunt for your ring. And then you jolly well put it on again."

"And what made her go away like that?" said Una over her shoulders.

"Don't you know that?"

"No I don't."

"Then I'm not going to tell you."

But he lied to himself. Even in that moment he foresaw that in a minute, five minutes, whatever his resolution might be now, he would be telling her that very thing—that Winifred Harrowby had gone off without a word in order that they should be thrown together. Not that he thought for a single moment that Winifred Harrowby cared a rap about himself. How much she cared for Una Paull he did not know. Her motive lay deeper. Half a dozen times she had allowed the cat to peep out of the bag. And now, as far as Kenneth could see, she had done what she had intended all along to do—to slip this stiletto into Rex's heart.

"Good-bye," she said again.

But he stood in the way.

"Do you suppose I'm going to let you go like this?" he asked.

"Why did Winnie Harrowby leave me with you?"

"It only takes a pair of eyes to see," he answered.

"Say I haven't got a pair of eyes then."

"Because she wanted us to be together."

Again she meant one thing, said another.

"I wonder what she thought was going to happen!" she flung scornfully at him.

"You needn't worry. It isn't. But I know what she's after."

"What?" she demanded.

"Exactly what you're doing now."

"Do you mean about my not having Rex?"

"Of course I mean about your not having Rex. She bet herself she'd do it, and you're letting her."

"Will you please remember you're speaking of one of my friends?"

"I'm thinking about Rex."

"I'm very sorry for Rex, but there's one thing I won't do, and that's marry him."

"You'd just walk out of the house instead?"

"I certainly shan't ask you what I'm to do," was her retort.

He used irony. "Perhaps he might like to hear it over the telephone?"

"Would you be so good as to mind your own business?"

She was in reality perhaps one hundred times less angry than she sounded. Already that pain she must cause the man she must dismiss loomed ahead, prophetically announcing itelf. To deal one wound at a time is more than enough for most of us; implor-ingly, pathetically, we look round for somebody on whom to bestow a compensating kindness. No danger need lurk in that kindness. She was not now in love with anybody. She might be approaching the wider seas of life, but it was on no voyage of discovery for love. Kenneth Chacey had behaved badly, but that was over, with so much else. And half his care-lessness was obviously put on. Why add a wretched bicker to an unavoidable wound? She knew that when the moment came to tell Rex she herself would

suffer too. Kenneth had turned to look for the ring again. She forgot she had said good-bye. She sat down on the sofa.

"You're only wasting your time," she said.

"I should be doing that anyway."

"I'd talk to you if you'd let me," she said, slowly and carefully.

"What about?"

"I don't know. . . . I don't know what you do nowadays or anything about you."

"Well, just at present I'm trying to save another fellow from a pretty hard knock."

She put out her hands. Her brow was drawn with that pain so soon to be inflicted.

"Oh, Kenneth, if you mean Rex, don't! I don't know how I'm going through with it! But he never had the right idea about me at all! He's no idea how I should disappoint him! He's always seeing things in me that aren't me a bit! He always did! I know it's all my fault. And he ought to marry somebody else. There must be lots of girls who would make him happy. I shouldn't. He's so, so good, but——" She stopped, colouring in spite of herself.

He looked at her, a little more consideringly.

"I don't know what it is you want to know," he said. "If it's anything about me I should have thought you knew all you wanted. And if you guess the rest you won't be far wrong."

"Now you're putting me off again! I haven't anybody!" she almost wailed.

He gave her a swift look. "Well, isn't that the idea?"

"No, no, no——"

"Well, I think you'll find it is," he said bluntly. "I can't make you marry Rex if you don't want to,

but you might easily do worse. Rex and I don't think the same, but that's neither here nor there. I don't know that getting married interests me much. I'm a man's man. And anyway I couldn't. I suppose if I cared to knock off drinks and cigarettes, and never to have more than fourpence in my pocket for fear I should spend it, and ride on bus-tops, and carry my lunch about with me wrapped in paper, and do what a million other people have to do, I might be able to ask a girl to share a couple of furnished rooms with me by the time I was Rex's age. But I just don't think it's worth the trouble. I worked that out for myself a long time ago."

"I can see you aren't a bit like what you used to be."

"No. I believed what people told me then," he replied.

His manner was hard and without expression, and again she noticed how his face had changed, not so much in any one particular as in the whole look of it. His brow was smooth, but there were little hair-lines at the corners of his mouth. His complexion was well enough, but his eyes might have been clearer. All this she took in as a reader grasps the purport of a paragraph at a glance. And perhaps it was something richer and deeper than their former nascent love that awoke in her as she looked. Perhaps it was something of a different quality altogether. Bewildered by life, claimed almost before she had begun to have any knowledge of herself, she sought wistful escapes from it all. She found them in the potential and hitherto unsuspected mother in her. She wished that he could feel he was befriended. She wanted to tell him that even though they did not meet something worth keeping still remained between them. If only he could be made

to understand all this she could have taken his hand and said good-bye almost cheerfully.

The idea of any other physical contact with him would have been the last thing to enter her head.

But he was smiling again, as if he regretted his momentary lapse from attitudinizing.

"Rum world, isn't it, Una?" the hard voice said; and her name on his lips seemed a cracked bell that had once thrilled with a silvery note.

"Oh, Kenneth——" Her hands were put timidly forward.

"You see," he went on, "I used to think things had a bottom of some sort. Perhaps they had then. Now I only know that you've got to grab what you can while you can or else do without. If you wait for anybody to give you anything you'll wait a long time. And if there's anything else you want to know——"

But he checked himself. What was the good of bothering her with all that? How he spent his life had nothing to do with her. Who his friends were was none of her business. Where he met them—whether at a reputable place or at a police-watched haunt in Soho—was his own concern. He meant Nini of course. His car had begun to know almost of itself the way to the gate two doors from the Powis Laundry that had had the cast-iron spear-heads knocked off. Nini's "What time to-morrow, *mon ami?*" had become an habitual question. And from waiting for her in the car at the broken gate he had passed to waiting for her in one half of her single upper room while, behind a dull red curtain that ran on a pole with a rattle of wooden rings, she made herself ready in the other half. He had no intention whatever of making a fool of himself. Houses of the kind in which she dwelt are kept chastely private.

The folly, if there is any, takes place elsewhere. He would see to it that there was no folly.

He would also see to it that Una Paull should never hear a whisper of any of these things from him. The best thing for her to do was to find her ring, marry Rex, and have done with it.

But, exactly as if she read this conclusion in his thoughts, she suddenly gave a sharp little cry of refusal.

"I can't, I can't, I can't! I must go straight to him and tell him! He said it would all come right soon, and it hasn't, and I just can't bear it! Oh, don't you see, Kenneth?"

He shrugged his straight shoulders. "It's nothing to do with me."

"Oh, I haven't *any* friends!" she moaned, her face in her hands.

"Come, we needn't be enemies. But if you ask me, we're heaps better out of one another's way."

She had drawn near to him. She had placed her hand on his sleeve. Her face was towards the drawn honey-coloured sunblinds, across one corner of which the shadow of the branch crept and played. His back was to blind and shadow. He felt the appeal of the small hand on his sleeve, saw her eyes on his own, begging him to be friends. She could not have known that it would have been better to have left him that hard bright armour behind which he hid himself. She could not have known of the hungers unsatisfied in him, nor that, while she herself might be full of cool and affectionate longings, he was there to be set fire to. The hand was still on his sleeve, the eyes beseechingly on his. She did so wish to be simply friends with him.

But all at once she started away from him. Her eyes were on his no longer, but gazing over his

shoulder. Neither he nor she had heard the opening and closing of the side gate, but a shadow had fallen across the blind. Kenneth too had swung round. His eyes caught the last of the shadow as it passed.

It was only Edwards, and the blind was once more a sunny blank.

But everything between those two was changed.

He was looking into her eyes with an expression before which her own dropped in confusion.

"Why did you do that?" he demanded in a low voice.

"Do what?" she asked faintly.

"Jump away like that."

"I didn't—I don't know——"

"You do know. You thought it was Rex."

"No, no——"

"You thought it was Rex," he repeated.

"Oh, I could have told him now and got it over if it had been——"

Then only, lifting her eyes again, was she afraid of the light that danced in his. Then only, as he took a swift step forward, did she fall trembling back.

"Then by Jingo, if it's like that——"

It was not that he was released from his loyalty to another man. It had nothing to do with his past and hers, nothing to do with their future. He knew that his wild act would end everything between them for ever. But the whole accumulation of the starvation of his days swept over him. He was the man who snatches at a loaf and takes to his heels. She should not have started so guiltily at the passing of a shadow, charging everything with a new significance. Before God, he *would* have had something out of his life when he came to leave it! He *would* have had his moment, accountable for to nobody! Grab what

you could while you could—that was the way! There would be plenty of time to think about it when it was all over——

He took her ruthlessly in his arms, pursuing her averted mouth, straining her, covering her hair, her throat, the back of her neck with kisses.

It would have been kinder to strike her between the eyes. The world did not contain anything more removed from her thinking. Her breast had swelled to him fondly but passionlessly; now, in the very moment when she must deny one man, another hurled himself upon her. And so hurled himself! She might not have been an equal-born being of flesh and blood . . . no, no, she was wrong! Too much flesh, too hot and racing blood! New and hateful things surged in her. Alternately she struggled, then almost completely failed before the horrible realism.

And then, as suddenly as he had seized her, he released her.

"At any rate I've had that!" he panted.

Let who could take it away from him now!

Her face was buried in her hands. He hardly heard the shaky moan.

"How loathsome of you!"

"I told you you'd be better away——"

"*Oh, oh*——"

She felt that she could never belong to herself again.

Then, as they stood there, he gross with triumph, she shaken by shudder after shudder, fate took its last fling at them. How long he had been there neither of them knew, but, looking down on them, in the very spot where Kenneth had once stood watching a dancing-lesson, with his hands gripping the gallery rail and the bitterness of death on his brow, they were aware of Rex.

He was standing perfectly still, and his gaze seemed to have no focus. It might have been bent on something near, or on something beyond the walls of the room altogether. And when presently he did move, it was as an automaton might have moved. They saw his down-hung profile as he turned, not out of the room again, but along the gallery, down the three or four steps, and so round by the piano. He came up to them and stood before them, looking down at the ground at their feet, his hands motionless by his sides, the plaiting of his thinning hair presented to them. He might have been a felon up for sentence, they his judges.

And if words must be used at all, only one tone was possible for Kenneth. Explanation, justification, apology—away with these! Let the fight come quickly, let any weapon be used, and let it be a fight to a finish. Casual effrontery would serve admirably.

"Hallo, been here long?" he asked.

But neither word nor look came from the man whose head was bowed for sentence. He might not have heard.

"Well, there's only one thing to be done," Kenneth remarked. "Understand this, though. It's nothing to do with her. It's my doing. So it's between you and me."

Still Rex stood as motionless as one of the carved pillars of the mantelpiece.

"Well, that's that," said Kenneth, moving away. "You know where to find me."

Then Rex slowly lifted his eyes—to Una.

Never yet did it soften such a blow to have known beforehand that it was bound to come. Even a foreseen anguish is no less an anguish when the hour strikes. Else the human heart would not die, but

be changed. For a worldly bankruptcy we take provision. We call our creditors together, arrange our compositions. But not so with our souls' accounts. That dread Receiver of the Spirit grants no discharge. All must be paid to the uttermost farthing, or the term served. And perhaps that was the judgment that Rex Wyecastle, lifting his eyes to Una Paull's, awaited.

Then, surprisingly, he did speak, and in perfectly ordinary tones. Kenneth's step, sounding at the end of the gallery, seemed to rouse him. Casually he turned his head.

" Wait, you," he said.

Then his eyes were turned to Una again.

He knew that it was over. He knew it superstitiously if you like. Or rather, it was not " it " that was over at all; it was he himself who was over, in the totality of the things that had made up his life. It was not a question of the last two hours; the end had lain folded up in the very beginning. Fair enough his life had looked on the surface, but for a long time he had looked beneath the surface. No need to urge the parallels that beat like the tapping of a thousand hammers in his head. Hidden relations seemed to establish themselves instantaneously between things that had seemed poles apart. There, in his Office, the apparatus was controlled, but here was the quivering, palpitating nerve-stuff that was its fuel. And he himself was poised for a moment longer over the chasm between the two. He had loved and laboured equally in vain. At the poignant contact with human experience his systems had become dust. Henceforward that ferment of forces that is To-day must be directed by younger hands than his.

Bitter, that had he kept his love he might have

remained the punctilious official! Strange, that he must lose her in order to learn all this!

But her task was cruelly simple. It had nothing to do with tottering systems. She had only to tell him that she no longer wanted him, and was trying to do it. And one thing she must make clear.

"There isn't anybody else, Rex—there's nobody—it isn't that at all—I'd tell you if there was—I would, I would——"

And then suddenly the thought of a scene seemed horrible. An attack of sheer cowardice took her. She wanted to run from the room.

"Oh, please, please let me go!" she cried.

"And I say"—it was Kenneth's voice—"need I stay much longer either?"

Rex had forbidden him to leave. At an earlier time this would not have been necessary. The two men would have bowed, four other men would presently have come together, and the shot of a pistol or the thrust of a blade would have settled it. Something primitive and dangerous in this simplification seemed to come suddenly over Rex. It came in a wave of anger such as he had never known. It would decide nothing, for all was fatally decided already. It would not bring his love back, it would neither make him young again nor ease that spiritual burden that was crushing him. But it would serve its purpose. There stood his nephew, so—have at him! Before Rex's heart died another heart too should be sorry it had ever been born! He threw up his head. He wheeled round to where Kenneth stood above him. His voice rang out.

"Yes, I told you to wait. I'll finish with *you*, Temporary Major Kenneth Chacey, D.S.O., M.C.——"

The young man's back straightened. "Leave that out, will you?" he said sharply.

"——demobilized officer and ex-gentleman——"

"I tell you to leave that out. That's nothing to do with it."

"Oh, I've seen you with your women before! Every despicable trick of a cold-blooded game at your finger-ends——"

"Must you?"

"Look me in the eyes and deny it! You can't! *That's* your loyalty! *That's* your decency! *That's* your honour! Oh, I saw it long ago! I saw it that other day, when you tried to lie to me! Do you dare to tell me it wasn't so?"

"I wasn't thinking of telling you anything at all."

"Then get out of this room! Get out of this house! Don't show your face here again! Go to your other women—one's the same as another to you—*I* know you——"

The blood had gone from Kenneth's face at these last words. For a moment he dropped his head. But he lifted it again. He marched, not out of the room, but along the gallery and down. He stood before his uncle.

"That's just where you've overdone it," he said quietly. "You can look me in the eyes now."

"I do. They're disloyal."

"I'm to leave this room."

"And not to be long about it."

"Our room—Claude's and Ronnie's and Toby's and mine——"

"You don't leave it as clean as they did."

Kenneth's voice dropped lower still. It might have been a different man who spoke, a man bowed down with experience, old before his time.

"Yes. That's what you won't forgive us. Us who're left. We're in your way. We aren't dead."

"That's enough of that," Rex commanded.

"We're here. Alive. You don't know what to do about us. We're a nuisance. You can't go on as you have gone on. We're in your way."

"We won't try to make a little cheap capital out of the war."

But the young man went on, in the same curiously reflective voice.

"No, we've heard that too. The war's over. It suits somebody's book to have it over. Talk about anything you like, but don't talk about the war."

"Have you finished?"

As if the slow match had fired the instantaneous fuse, the young man flashed.

"*Finished?* No, I haven't begun! I've heaps to say yet, and you're going to hear it! Oh, it's all right for you! You're on velvet right enough! You've only got to sit tight and you take a lot of shifting! But what about me? Where do I come in? Eh?"

"If you haven't gathered my opinion of you——"

But Kenneth was not now to be stopped. Out it must come, if never again, the right with the wrong, the true with the false, the justice with the injustice, the blindness with the seeing, the personal grievance and the disregard of all other aspects than his own thrown inextricably together. His hand shook as he challenged his uncle.

"Oh, it wasn't the start of *your* lives! *You'd* had time to fix yourselves up! *You* had jobs and billets and something to come back to! But look at that chap!" The shaking hand was flung out in the direction of a photograph. "That's my brother Claude! Claude and I were for it before we were eighteen! Look at him!" The hand was swung out to another photograph. "See him? That's Toby! Toby'd just started reading with a tutor in

summer '14!" Again the wild gesture of the hand. "And see that? That's Ronnie's quarter-mile pot! Did Ronnie ever smell a job? *I* know what Ronnie smelt! Oh yes, the war's over all right—if you're killed!"

"All this——" said Rex; but if he meant that his nephew's outburst had nothing to do with the subject in hand he was taken up before the words were out of his mouth.

"Oh, hasn't it! Look here. You talk about my tricks with women. I suppose you mean that morning when I came in and found you dancing. Well, what about it? What if I did play the silly ass for a bit? Where was the harm? Who was more amused than you were? Wonderful the way I kept my spirits up, *that* morning! Natural high spirits I had, *that* morning. Merry-and-bright—thumbs up—that was the dope *that* morning! And that's where you seem to expect us to stop, with that silly grin on our faces, while you chat about the war being over!"

"These cheap heroics——"

"There you go—everything but that grin's cheap heroics! We just grin and forget all about it! But don't you make any mistake! It takes a bit of forgetting! Listen—hear that?" he cried, as with dramatic suddenness music was heard, loud and near at hand. It was a barrel-organ. "Hear that? '*Pack up Your Troubles.*' Pack 'em up! Town's full of music—music and grin—plenty of music and lots of grin—that's the stuff to give the troops!"

"If I'm to understand by all this——"

"Bunk!" The word sounded like a stone dropping into a deep well. "You'd better come and talk to me when you know a bit more about it! Don't suppose you ever see a soul who doesn't think

just the same as you do! Why don't you come out and see *what's going on?* You'd better come and see a few of *my* pals! We're merry-and-bright too! Why? Because bang goes three quid a week and commission if that grin comes off! Nobody wants a long-faced hero scaring his customers away! That grin and a Limerick or two—latest from the Stock Exchange—that's where we make the paper marks, old son! That's where the firm gets the orders from! And do you want to know what it all is? It's all a hoax—just a dirty hoax!"

Where was now the Kenneth Chacey who knew how many figures on a Treasury note a sixpence would cover, or how many H's there were on a packet of Gold Flake cigarettes? Where was the young man who lounged away his days before a betting-blackboard or his nights in whatever club or ken it happened to be? Where were the gaiety and the swagger and the good-humoured contempt for life as it presented itself to him? They were not to be seen. He was not a culprit, caught red-handed in the moment of a blackguardly act. He was a finished-with, futureless man, still some years under thirty, with twenty friends among the dead for one there was to help him now. And it might have been that after all he wasn't worth helping. Perhaps he was essentially and personally unhelpable. Perhaps he ought to have been swept out, with the rest of the débris of his Time. But one thing he did. He existed. He was to be reckoned with, and anybody who tried to reckon without him would commit an error.

And more was to come, for again he turned on the silent Rex.

"And then that morning—remember? Remember your telling me you were going to be married? Oh

yes! You tell *us*, out of a job, that *you* aren't out of a job! You tell us *you're* comfortably off, thanks, decent house, money in the bank, and *you're* going to be married! And not to a dancing-mistress—'I'm not going to marry my dancing-mistress!' Not to a barmaid or a girl you pick up in the Park! Oh no! Those are the odds-and-ends! Perhaps *we're* supposed to prefer 'em. But look here. Suppose we don't? Suppose we say *we* prefer our own sort too? There's somebody you've been fool enough to fall out with—*she'd* open your eyes for you! Yes. I mean that Harrowby woman. And did you give us all this pi-jaw about our morals during the war? Listen!—'*Pack Up Your Troubles!*'" It was the organ, beginning the tune anew. "Not much you didn't! You winked the other eye *then!* It was a short life and a gay one *then!* It didn't matter so much *then!* Your skin wasn't touched *then!* A bit of fun was a fair swap for something else *then!* Don't pretend you didn't see it all! Don't tell me you didn't see it all going on! Women you hadn't known ten minutes chucking themselves at you—strangers bathing you in champagne—glad-eye and a night in a Turker and the boat-train again—remember? And now you're trying to kid yourselves it didn't happen! It's over, like the war—I *don't* think! And now let *me* tell *you* something. About this afternoon. It wasn't everything you think. I tried to do the straight thing by you. And I never lied to you that other time in your office either, not to do you any harm. I *did* know her before. I knew her a couple of years before you did. And I kept out of the way. I'm not going to tell you why. She can tell you if she likes. And now"—there was sudden menace in Kenneth Chacey's face—"I want to know who *you* are, to tell me one woman's the

same as another to me? Anything'll do for *us*, but *you're* going to be married, eh? Well, if you want to know, that's what the music's all about! Just that. My pals and I know as well as you do the country's hard-up. We don't mind going on short commons with the rest. We'll see the London kiddies get their milk and all that. We'll fight again, if we're told what for. We're English all right, you needn't worry about that. But when it comes to women you'd better look out. The cream for you and the skim for us isn't going to work. *That's* what the music's about! You go to your office and tell 'em. And you can tell 'em while you're about it that every time they hear a street-band or see a poor devil rattling a box that's up to them too. And now is there anything else you want me to stop for? Because if there isn't I think I'll be fading along——"

The music stopped suddenly. Dead silence reigned in the room. In the middle of it, and without once looking behind him, Kenneth Chacey made for the gallery, passed along it, and walked out of the place.

PART III

I

THE CLUB

KENNETH had decided to call his club " The Kit Bag Club," because it was to be a place where people could pack up their troubles. He stood there in the Boys' Room, revolving innumerable details. It was September, fine, sunny, and the glass high. He wanted to open by mid-November at the very latest.

Much had happened. Rex had been abroad, but was now back again, and in his different way as occupied as Kenneth himself. A great peace seemed to possess him, as if, losing all else, he had attained to some inner security that could never be lost. For he had lost all else. His chair at the Organization Office was filled by another man—Rex had sent in his resignation, and it had been accepted. He never mentioned Una Paull. And, on a business basis, for his resources must now be husbanded, he had turned over the Kensington house to Kenneth. That was why he had been to the South of France. His mother was not to live in a boarding-house or private hotel off the Cromwell Road. He had found a villa for the two of them. Maurice, except as a sleeping-partner in his cousin's enterprise, did not count. Maurice was now a sub-assistant assayer in the Mines Department, and henceforward would have to fit in his Rugger as he could.

Kenneth had a notebook in his hand. From the expression on his face it seemed to provide satisfactory reading. Blythe and Garstin had been as good as their word; the money was safe, lodged in a joint account, with interest and sinking-fund a first charge on the profits of the undertaking. The premises were at last secured. And Nini was coming in as instructress.

The Boys' Room was still the same to look at, but that would not be for long now. The carpenters—yes (Kenneth nodded over his notebook), that side of it was all O.K. The electricians—no need to go over all that again either. The dining and drawing-rooms thrown into one—a top-hole supper-room. The little ante-room upstairs for a card-room, American Bar at the end of the passage, and Mrs. Wyecastle's bedroom for the ladies to wash their hands and powder their noses in. Where the glass windows opened at the back he would put a revolving door, and across the garden, to the side-door, he would run a light awninged way. The interior work was to be supervised by Harrowbys, Consultants in Domestic Architecture and Decoration. After all, he had nothing against Winifred Harrowby, and she was charging him the barest cost-price. There was no risk of his meeting Una Paull. She was no longer there.

"The Kit Bag Club." He was pleased with the name. He thought of putting an old kit-bag over the high mantelpiece, where the old punt-gun and the fowling-pieces were, just as a bit of a novelty. And of course all this old junk of chairs and sofa and tables cluttered with photographs and what not would have to be cleared right out. All out-of-date and dowdy, and of no particular interest to anybody anyhow. But he was doubtful about the piano. He

would have liked to keep it, but it took up rather a lot of room, and an upright would do equally well for the jazz band. He would have to consider that. For the rest, Rex could make a bonfire of the whole lot as long as he got it out of the place in time for the workmen to begin.

And Lady Howmuch and Lady Balland had done all that was necessary in the matter of licences. Stout fellows, Garstin and Blythe—*they* knew where the money was! Their respective patronesses might leave something to be desired in certain respects, but a fellow can't have everything in this world. Kenneth was happy. After many ups and downs, he had at last found his sphere of usefulness.

" The Kit Bag Club "—yes, it was a dandy name. He would like to work the song itself in somewhere, as a sort of standing-order, just the chorus, to finish off with every night, going straight on into " God Save the King ":

What's the use of worrying?
It never was worth while,
So Pack Up your Troubles in your Old Kit Bag
And smile, smile, smile!

He had always liked that song. He had liked it almost as much as Mr. Kipling's " If," and better than " Roses in Picardy." " Roses in Picardy " was a bit on the sentimental side, and Kenneth was rather wide awake about sentiment just at present. There was Nini, for example.

He was as resolved as ever that he was not going to make a fool of himself. There would be very little sense in cooling off with Par-par in order to get entangled with Nini. Only once had he come near to losing his head, and that had been when, in her curtain-halved room in Powis Street, as he had waited

for her one afternoon, there had come a plaintive call from behind the curtain that she could not fasten some hook or eye or other, and she had come out, bare-armed and slender-naped, rather a revelation, and he had fastened the thing for her—that and (oh yes!) that other occasion, when he had come up behind her as she had sat in her deep basket-chair, had tilted the chair up until her black satin legs had stuck helplessly out, and had kissed her face upside-down out of mere mischief. It was all desultory and meant nothing, but there mustn't be too much of it. Business was business, and if she was going to be associated with him in this club there would have to be no nonsense of that kind. He had lent her five pounds, the exact amount his grandmother had pressed upon him on her birthday, and she would have to dance the debt off. He couldn't afford to give her the money. He had the control of ample funds for the purposes of the club, but every penny of that would have to be accounted for, and his personal resources were once more running rather alarmingly low. He and Nini had never re-visited the place in Soho where drink was illicitly served in the kitchen. He hadn't much fancied the men she met there. He had found one or two decenter places to take her to, and she was as quick to learn as a clever child. He had never asked her a word about her personal history. The most he knew of this was that she was not married.

"The Kit Bag Club," then, with Nini more or less permanently in attendance. And he had discovered other uses for her than her dancing. She could buy food, for example, far more cheaply than he, who did nothing cheaply, and she was by no means to be despised as a cook. Twice, tortured by his extravagance in restaurants, she had prepared a

supper for him in the room with the red curtain, using her landlady's kitchen and carrying the food up herself. He had not known what he was eating except that there was just a trace of garlic about it and that it had been top-hole and different from anything he had ever eaten before. She was not to be the club's *chef*, but she would keep an eye on that functionary, and could be depended on to tick him off with efficiency should occasion arise. And she was clever in a score of other ways, besides having a spaniel-like devotion for Kenneth. Her salary was fixed, to start with the opening of the club. It might later prove convenient that she should move from Powis Street in order to be nearer her work. But that could be settled by and by.

So it was to be " The Kit Bag Club," with a room for Nini in the house if necessary, interest on the sum advanced to be paid to Lady Balland and Lady Howmuch of Ware, and an agreed percentage of the profits to go to his uncle and his cousin Maurice. Kenneth had been over his calculations a hundred times, and found them watertight. He had his electrician, a fellow he had known in the Signal Corps. His carpenter had been Massingham's batman, as Edwards the butler had been Blythe's batman. Edwards was to stop on; Kenneth believed in keeping things in the family, so to speak. There are not many young men to-day who cannot at a pinch lay their hands on a butcher or baker or candlestick-maker of whom they had never heard in August, '14.

But for all his general satisfaction, he knew that it was not going to be altogether plain sailing. Lady Balland and Lady Howmuch were indispensable to his project, but they were also a thorn in his side. He could only leave them to Blythe and Garstin and

hope for the best. And now a word further about Blythe and Garstin and their jobs.

In Musical Chairs, the moment the music stops you drop into the chair that is nearest to you. So, when the other music had stopped, Blythe had done. He had his missing arm to thank for his luck, for young men minus an arm or a leg had been rather taken up by ladies at that time, and Blythe had, moreover, a crest on his hairbrushes even though he hadn't the brilliantine to use with them. The social instruction of Lady Howmuch was the chair into which Blythe had dropped, very glad indeed of a seat of any kind.

Nobody quite knew the amount of the fortune left by the late Sir Henry Howmuch, who had been laid to rest a couple of years before, not across the seas, but in a smoke-blackened cemetery on the outskirts of his native Hodsbury. Enough that it had left his widow vertiginously rich. A full half-company of servants and what-not was necessary for the mere administration of the estate. This included, besides the place in the New Forest (so many-acred that a sizeable hamlet on its outskirts seemed a mere extension of its farm-buildings), the house in Portman Square—the house with the silver bath set in black marble, and the oriental smoke-room for the designing of which Harrowbys', of South Molton Street, had sent an emissary expressly to the Golden Horn.

All of which had been quite good enough for the brown-eyed and charming Blythe.

And Blythe had looked ahead too. Even a social secretaryship in such an establishment was not to be sneezed at, but a full private-secretaryship would be even better. To this end Blythe had had several artificial limbs fitted—for shawl-holding and opening doors and placing chairs is all very well, but when it comes to opening letters and tapping a typewriter

two arms are better than one. But fashions in pets change. Another man, of whom Blythe was not very fond, had got the secretaryship, and did not look like relinquishing it. So which was the better—a one-armed job that was getting a little out of fashion, or no job at all? As with his homes, now at Craddock's and now at Miss Massingham's flat, so with Blythe's job.

All these things are involved in Musical Chairs, when the tune stops suddenly and you find a seat where you can.

Then Lady Howmuch herself had her little idiosyncrasies. One must be careful how one speaks of a lady of fabulous wealth who may one day be in a Book of Brasses. It is highly unsafe to say of such an one that she drinks like a fish. So let us merely say that in the North, where, during the palmy days of control, they breakfasted on bacon-and-eggs and champagne, they are also fond of a drop of rum in their tea. After a bout in her Turkish boudoir a day in a Turkish bath was a not infrequent necessity. Then Blythe took a day off. He needed it for many reasons. One of them was that Lady Howmuch's " h's " sometimes exceeded in number, and sometimes fell short of, those on the end of a packet of Gold Flake cigarettes.

And where, if she came from Hodsbury, did the " Ware " come in?

Well, strictly speaking, it didn't. But there *are* Howmuches of Ware, rooted and established, and families do ramify in extraordinary ways. Winifred Harrowby, who fitted silver baths and boudoirs from the Golden Horn, had also some skill in pedigrees. Lady Howmuch could have bought up the whole of Ware had it been for sale. There is no harm in adopting the name of a place you could buy and put

into your pocket. As a matter of fact the whole question of Lady Howmuch's pedigree was being thoroughly investigated at that moment, and anyway who cares?

It is even less safe to speak of Garstin's Lady Balland than of Lady Howmuch, for she is not a widow, and may yet become somebody very exalted indeed. Her name was Virginia, and it gratified her that Annie Howmuch's place in the New Forest could not hold a candle to her own magnificent and Harrowbyized domain in Dorset. At present her husband was a Baronet, without issue. It is a pity to be a Baronet without issue. One might just as well have been a Knight and kept the difference in one's pocket. Issue? Sir Thomas was sixty-nine.

But Coke of Norfolk was older still. So one never can tell.

You see the thorn that was already in Kenneth's side. He hoped that these pillars of the club would not put in an appearance very often. The result might be that one or two people he rather wanted to come would stay away. Well, there was nothing for it but tact. Kenneth knew the value of tact. Nothing but tact had kept him from falling out with Winifred Harrowby. What a mercy he had not done so!

For her suggestions had been invaluable. Curtains, palms, screens, gilt rout-chairs. The dinkiest bizarre hanging lamps, dirt-cheap too, dumped from Czecho-Slovakia. Coloured bulbs outlining the covered way across the garden, and the room where the ladies powdered their noses Louis Seize. With her to advise him in these matters and Nini to do the catering and keep an eye on economy, he was in luck. Now about the wines. Most important. Kenneth wasn't going to try to save money on his cellar. He intended to

make money on his cellar. Ferrers was going to see to that side of it. What Ferrers didn't know about cocktails, for example, wasn't knowledge. Kenneth could mix one or two himself, but Ferrers could take a brandy and a curaçao, put them into a shaker, and the result would be lemonade. Ferrers could concoct a potent coffee with no coffee in it, and knew what Pimms' Number One was made of. Valuable chap. Kenneth was going to take lessons from Ferrers. There was to be a Kit Bag Cocktail. Give Kenneth something really useful to do and you would find him thorough.

Then the band. That had given him a good deal of anxiety. He wasn't sure all his troubles were over yet. For, fundamentally, nine-tenths of politeness and consideration for others are based on the phenomenon of sound. Now a band exists in order to produce sound. You can shut your eyes to something you do not wish to see, but you have to hear sound whether you want to or not. Kenneth was about to make nightly sounds in one of the stiffer of the Kensington Squares. People mightn't like it. He didn't know many of his neighbours, and even if he had known them he could hardly go round to them and say, "I am starting a dancing-club across the way there; I cannot dance without music; I hate to spoil your sleep and all that, but if you kick up a fuss about it you put me in the cart, see?" And here again Winifred Harrowby had come to his help. It appeared that there were contrivances known as sound-deadeners. They would hardly transmute the fortissimo passages of a jazz band into complete silence, but they would absorb some of it—quite a lot, Kenneth hoped. Anyway he had got his licence. Lady Balland had wangled it for him, and he had not been such a fool as to ask her how. The room wasn't

really big. He wouldn't want a band at each end of it, as some places had. It needn't be at all a loud band. After all it was a pretty noisy world. Motor-cars and bikes and lorries made noises, and nobody tried to stop people having them. Everybody had pianos and played them. Kenneth was only going to have a piano, with a drum and cymbals, a Swanee-whistle and a ukulele, and the usual gadgets. In any case he intended to go ahead till somebody compelled him to stop.

"The Kit Bag Club," where people could bring their troubles and pack them up. Was there any wiser way to live? Kenneth didn't know of one, and judging from the amount of dancing that went on nobody else seemed to know of one either. "The Kit Bag Club"—decorations and sound-deadening by Harrowbys, drinks by Ferrers, instruction and other oddments by Nini, money by Lady Howmuch and Lady Balland, and himself in control of it all——

"The Kit Bag Club"——

Some club!

And he owed it all to poor old Rex.

That night, in the top back bedroom which he still retained at the Maeterlinck Hotel, Kenneth had a dream. The dream was about his boots. But he was not drilling them this time; they had command, and were bidding him, not to form fours, but to dance. "Kenneth—*dance!*" they seemed to cry, and in his sleep he danced. He didn't know who his partner was. Her face was close to his, but averted, and somehow he was not at all curious to know who it was he was dancing with. It was enough that they floated as it were together, a little way off the ground, he and some unknown she, while "*Dance!*" the boots commanded. He dimly remembered something about it in the morning, and broke out laughing

as he lay lazily in bed. Yet he didn't know why he laughed. There was nothing particularly humorous in it after all.

II

STAGES OF COURTSHIP

I

THE first thing that young Maurice had done on getting his Mines job had been to buy young Maurice a present. No need to ask what it was. It could do just over a hundred full out and in tune, and leave Kenneth's two-seater standing. He called it the Roadeater, and it had no sidecar.

He had a whole fortnight to himself before taking up his appointment. During that fortnight the Roadeater had eaten most of Surrey and Middlesex, about half of Kent, with a nibble or two at Hampshire and Bucks. Maurice was just a bit of a speed-merchant. He would not have respected himself had he taken Reigate Hill on anything less than top, and the Eater streaked through a straight mile like a shell from a gun. Could he have been at both ends of that mile simultaneously he would have been entirely happy. Of course he saw nothing but one continuous streamline of rushing landscape—not a flower, not a bird, not a brook, not a glimpse of wood or dell. "That's a pretty village, wasn't it?" he sometimes thought. He wasn't out to see a lot of sheepings and flowerings. And the swiftness of his passage had the advantage to pedestrians that they

were the more quickly rid of the fury of his blown hair, his hideous goggles, and the stench of his exhaust. Twice, in the hill-climbing tests at Alms Hill, he had nearly broken his neck. The next time, if they don't fill in that rut at the top, he certainly will.

If you loved Maurice you must love his bus too. Speak slightingly of her or her performance and Maurice would freeze you with a look. Ask him to talk about her—but there. He didn't need asking. You might have to ask him to stop.

On a day the Eater was taking her snack of road —Leighton Buzzard and back in time for a set of tennis before tea. Near Stanmore she passed a small coupé car in difficulties. Maurice managed to pull up the Eater just as she was setting teeth into the next village, came straddlingly round, and returned to the breakdown to see whether he could be of any help. He loved to be sent off for assistance in such cases. It showed off the Eater's appetite to have been two miles and back again before they could get the tool-box open.

The bonnet was open, and two girls were looking helplessly in. One of them Maurice had never seen before. The other was Una Paull.

It was not easy to embarrass young Maurice Chacey, except perhaps by means of a police-trap. Girls embarrassed him not at all. They existed in large quantities as an exceedingly pleasant sort of fauna, but when it came to important things, such as lab-work or Rugby football, a fellow—he didn't quite know how to put it—one didn't exactly let them off lightly, and yet one didn't expect quite so much from them. In fact one ragged them for a bit and then talked about tennis or a show. Now he wished to goodness that he hadn't seen that break-

down but had kept the Eater straight on her hungry course. Rex's broken engagement wasn't any of his business, but for all that he hardly knew what to do or say. He couldn't keep on with his "Aunt-Una-ings," and yet he couldn't pretend nothing had occurred. He remembered his uncle's face too well for that, just before he had set off for France. In short, Maurice was in a dilemma. Young men to-day are in a dilemma when they have got into the habit of thoughtlessly pulling young women's legs and they suddenly find themselves deprived of that resource.

So, "Hallo, what's wrong?" he asked.

She did not at first introduce him to her companion, who was much of her own age. Without greeting, and as if his arrival had been expected, she simply answered his question.

"We don't know. We'd put it right if we did."

"Let's have a look-see."

Three minutes told him what the trouble was. It was a cracked cylinder-case, an acetylene welding job, and if the car belonged to the other girl she might say good-bye to it for a week or two.

"So that's that," he said, not at all displeased with the swiftness and certainty of his diagnosis. "That'll cost about fifteen quid. Take two days to take her all down. Better both hop up behind me and we'll get us hence and find somebody."

"Oh, Mollie!" broke crossly from Una Paull.

"So there you are," said Maurice.

The Eater had no objection to carrying three if they could hold on. Three can hardly sit in such intimate proximity and not know one another's names. Both Miss Sutherland's arms were tightly locked about Maurice's waist. "This is Miss Sutherland," said Una, and added, so that nobody should

be able to say that she was not performing the introduction handsomely, " She's a doctor."

" I'll bet she can't doctor that cylinder-case," quoth Maurice. " Sit tight—the clutch goes in with a bit of a jump sometimes——"

There was a short shattering roar, and the Eater had put a couple of miles under its belt.

He found a garage for them and made arrangements for the salving of the car. Then he asked them, What about some tea? Una might have refused, but Miss Sutherland, who was dark-eyed and very pretty indeed, had already accepted. There was no train for nearly two hours, and as for going back on the Roadeater, which Maurice suggested, they had had a taste of her voracity.

" That's all right," he reassured them. " Lots of chaps I know have had the wind up on that bracket. I'll take you quite slowly."

Una wanted to tell him that she had not been frightened in the very least, but the time for putting him into his place was not yet. It came, as a matter of fact, some weeks later, after Maurice had bought the side-car. They insisted on paying for their own tea. He saw them to the station, where they begged him not to wait. But wait he would, and did. He had a reason. The train moved away. Miss Sutherland's hand was waved to him from the window, but all he saw of Una was her profile. He watched the train out of sight, and sought the Eater.

He had been waiting on the platform at Euston for five minutes when the train arrived. He strolled up as they alighted, straightening his shoulders as if he had just got out of bed.

" Hallo chaps," he yawned.

Miss Sutherland could hardly accept his good offices and not see him again, even had she been that

sort of girl. Presently she was still more in his debt, for twice, once on a Saturday afternoon and once on a Sunday (for the Roadeater fasted during the week when Maurice took up his job) he had taken her to see how the repairs were going on. The car was her uncle's car, and its owner might have looked after it himself, but Miss Sutherland said that she wouldn't dream of giving him all that trouble. All he need do was to find the fifteen pounds. On neither trip did Una accompany them. She was waiting at home when they returned at seven o'clock on the Sunday evening. She looked up from the book she was reading. She had had a splendid time, she said. She loved being left alone sometimes.

The two girls lived together, in a sort of Students' Club not far from the Albert Hall. Many of the girls were students of music, and pianos thrummed and fiddles scraped all day long. But Una was a student of nothing very definite. Certainly she was not a student of the art of Consultancy in matters of Domestic Architecture and Decoration. She had told Winifred Harrowby, quite suddenly one day, that she was very grateful for all she had received, but really didn't think she would ever understand it, and had thanked her again and said good-bye. She had then gone out, not to find a job, but to go to a place where the jobs came in order to find people who would perform them. It was in Dover Street, and it was called Helping Hands. You or I want, say, a temporary secretary, or a travelling companion, or somebody to look after the boys when they come home from school. We go to Helping Hands. Una was a Hand. So far she had only actually helped once, and that had been when she had read "Holy Living and Holy Dying" to an aged lady whose memory of the work was so letter-perfect that she

had pulled Una up at the slightest inaccuracy. But another job was sure to want somebody soon. In the meantime she had got two books on Domestic Economy, had a room next to Mollie's, and sometimes went over of an afternoon to tea at Philippa Hyde's diminutive studio in Jubilee Place, Chelsea.

And Maurice Chacey needn't go to the expense of a side-car on her account. He seemed to her the very pattern of a hundred other youths she saw about, only more so. It had even taken him a little time to get it into his head that Mollie really was a doctor, or learning to be one, and was probably just as good at her job as he was at his Mines. And that made her feel just a little resentful and lonely. She was not clever, like Mollie and Philippa. She understood plain sensible things, like the books on Domestic Economy. But what was Domestic Economy for? For wives, the answer would have been at one time. But all those ideas were old-fashioned. They simply meant getting married for a living and doing the housework as well, all over again. The Helping Hands might put her into a place where she could settle down for a longer or a shorter period, but that was only housekeeping for somebody else, and somebody else after that, until she became as old as the old lady she had read "Holy Living" to. Only girls knew about these things, and she would have died rather than discuss them with Maurice Chacey. Why, he had thought she was afraid on that odious noisy machine of his! If she ever were afraid she would take good care he never saw it! She wished Mollie wouldn't encourage him quite so much. Already he had come round once, quite uninvited. It wasn't that he was offensive or familiar or anything like that. He simply wanted showing his place once, and after that there might be hope for him. He

really wasn't bad-looking, if only one could have seen him for goggles and leather and fluttering hair and elephant's legs.

She discussed him with Mollie one evening. Mollie had gone to bed, and Una was sitting in her wrap on the bed's edge. Mollie's dark hair lay in two straight plaits down the coverlet, and the dark eyes seemed the darker for the white pillow and the little electric pillow-lamp in its aluminium shell over her head.

"I believe you're falling in love with him," said Una.

The eyes twinkled richly. "Me?"

"Well, how many times has he taken you to see that car?"

"Three. And it wouldn't make any difference if it was thirty."

"I get sick of hearing him talk about his bik-ings and his everything-else-ings, and the way he comes into the room with his silly 'Enter Maurice with his sunny smile——'"

Mollie shook with mirth, for which, however, Una saw no reason. "You are funny, Una!" she said.

"I don't feel funny."

"Come here." She drew the golden head down to her own dark one. "I think something's going to happen to-morrow," she whispered.

"Is he taking you on that thing again?"

"No," said Mollie, pursing her mouth tantalizingly.

"Are you going somewhere else with him?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"Who said it was him at all?"

Una sat suddenly up, holding the white shoulders

at arm's-length. Instantly every thought of Maurice Chacey had gone out of her head.

"*Who?*" she asked breathlessly.

There was a nod in Mollie's eyes.

"*Not Jack?*"

"I think so."

"How do you know?" broke excitedly from Una.

"I don't *really* know—except the way he looked——"

Una held her for one moment longer at arm's-length. Then, with an "Oh, how deliciously thrilling!" the two heads were together on the pillow and she was reproaching her friend. "Oh, why didn't you tell me before?"

And certainly Mollie, as she lay there between her plaits, should have sufficed Jack, whoever he was, or any other man.

The announcement, anticipatory though it might prove to be, made a difference. What the difference was Una was not quite sure, except that at any rate Mollie had not "got off with" Maurice Chacey. It must have been just the other way round all the time. Jack, whoever he was, by his mere existence, at once placed Maurice merely among Mollie's pals, for we can go about with anybody we like when we are in love with somebody else. And of course it didn't follow that because Maurice was Mollie's pal he must be Una's also. But it did alter things. For Mollie's sake she must try not to be quite so snappish with him. And—once more she felt suddenly lonely—if this about Jack came off she would see less of Mollie now. Philippa's studio would not hold two. She would be alone again, waiting for somebody who wanted a Helping Hand, just when everything had seemed jolly and settled. She couldn't blame Mollie. She supposed she couldn't really blame anybody.

But men were a sickening nuisance, Maurice Chacey and the whole lot of them. She thought again of that arena she had thought of once before, with all those stripling youths at one end and all the girls like herself at the other, one or two pairing off like Mollie, but most of them eyeing one another, advancing, withdrawing, hedging, compromising, and changing their minds twenty times over. That at any rate was one comfort—one could always change one's mind. You arranged beforehand that you weren't going to stick together any longer than you wanted to. And Maurice wasn't likely to try to kiss her. She didn't suppose he kissed anybody, unless it was that motor-bicycle of his. She felt herself to be years older in experience than he. Kisses, like everything else, would have to come to his lordship.

And he might buy a side-car or not, just as he pleased, but she was not going on that awful bracket again.

II

"But it is terrible, *mon chèr*, the way you spend money! It break the heart!"

It was her constant complaint, and he knew better than she how well it was justified. But it tickled him to tease her about it. By a lot of money she meant more than a shilling for a tip for a dinner for two; and Kenneth, while theoretically calculating his tip on the ten-percentage of the bill, often gave quite a lot more in practice. Then, seeing her look of horror, he would elaborately explain that he had only half-a-crown and a two-shilling piece in silver,

that he had a waiter to tip and a taxi to pay for, that the taxi-driver's legal fare was eighteen-pence, making two shillings with a sixpenny tip, and that it made no difference to him in the end whether the waiter got the half-crown and the taxi-driver the two-shillings, or the other way round.

Observe, a taxi-driver; for Kenneth no longer had a car. If one cares to be pedantic about it and to say that in reality he had never had a car, then have it so, and let us say that he no longer had even that complicated interest in it that he had once possessed. An owner—not the original one in whose title Kenneth's own contingent title had been based, but the next owner after that—this owner had foreclosed, or whatever the expression may be. He had done so very decently, having taken on the car-deal with all its encumbrances. For whatever efforts Kenneth had made to sell the car he had had ten pounds in cash and a handshake, and the matter had terminated. He still had the ten pounds, and a few pounds besides. But it was all he had, and, until the club should begin to yield a profit, it was all he was likely to have. The five pounds he had advanced to Nini could hardly be ranked as an asset.

Now the loss of the car involved a further point, which, strictly speaking, was a point of conscience. Some time during the past, no matter when, Kenneth had taken a vow that he would never walk again if he could help it. He had taken this vow in the days when he had decided that the beauty of the sunrise no longer appealed to him. And, on the point of honour as between this resolve not to walk and Nini's groans at his extravagance, he must either break his word to himself, or else occasionally give a taxi-driver half-a-crown for an eighteen-penny fare because he hadn't two shillings in his pocket. Nini,

it was true, walked less nowadays than formerly. It was less than half the distance from Powis Street to the house with the Boys' Room than it was from Soho or Lower Regent Street to the gate with the broken railings. Moreover, the journey could now be made during the hours when the trains were regularly running, instead of between three and five a.m. The fare from Notting Hill Gate Station to Gloucester Road by Underground was only a penny or two. And Kenneth, when he saved a shilling, usually righted matters again by spending two.

For she came to the Boys' Room now almost daily. Rex had begun to pack up, and bit by bit, as the indications of his departure increased, so did those other indications, that Kenneth was taking over. His club was no longer a dream in his mind, with nowhere else to put it. It had more even than a paper existence now. The paper stage was past. He had his list of prices for everything, had made his final selection of his firms, and at a word over the telephone the alterations would begin. There was no immediate hurry. Rex might take his time about clearing out drawers and cabinets and packing away papers and photographs and small semi-valuables in the three large packing-cases that stood in the Boys' Room, with an end of drapery or a cushion or two thrown over them, that Mrs. Wye-castle might as little as possible be made aware of the change. Anyway the tiny villa in the South of France was not yet quite in readiness, and Kenneth needs must wait for that. Rex showed a perfect willingness to help, had his suggestions not been hopelessly out-of-date and impracticable. He moved unhurryingly about, talked ordinarily and in measured tones. He had accepted everything, Kenneth and his projects with the rest. To all appear-

ances it cost him not a pang to assist in the transfiguration of this room he had so laboriously set up. And his "Bon jour, Mademoiselle" when Nini appeared was equable, and provocativeness had gone from her manner.

As, formerly, Rex had regretted his outbreak against his nephew, so now Kenneth would have given much to recall those wild minutes in which he had upbraided his uncle on the day of Mrs. Wyecastle's luncheon-party. Poor old Rex, what had it to do with him after all? Rex had done his best, everybody had done their best. Things were simply too big to handle if they were contended over. Men would have to come together over them. At present they staggered under the weight of them, and the chances were that one lot would not handle them very differently from another. You cannot turn a world upside-down and have it the right way up again all in a moment. The right way up in the new conditions has first to be found, and Kenneth dumbly felt that it would not be found by outbreaks such as his own, any more than by an older man pointing to a young one's nicotine-stained fingers and telling him that he smoked too many cigarettes and that he was lounging while his country was in peril. So a quiet understanding reigned between the two men. For all the reference that had since been made to them on either side, those two violent scenes might never have occurred. Rex had his irremediable wound, with youth, love and usefulness gone, and Kenneth had his hopes, considerably tempered by the neighbourhood's possible objection to music and a few other matters. It was a harmonious taking-over on the one part and a quiet stepping-out on the other, with goodwill and without fuss. And one evening, as Rex had moved about doing this little

thing and that, a curious little incident had occurred. Kenneth had been taking some measurement or other, and the two men had found themselves side by side in a recess by the chimney-breast. Suddenly their eyes had met. Without a word spoken, without premeditation, their hands had met suddenly in a close grip. They had looked steadily at one another. In both pairs of eyes had been the accepted fullness of the knowledge of all that both of them had lost. And it was as if the very room was a presence about them. One of them must leave it if he must, the other must turn it into something else. But the room, the symbol of so much that was dear and deathless, must remain. What it would finally be neither of them might live to see. A younger still would step into that heritage.

They gave and took this knowledge as eyes looked into eyes.

Then their hands parted, and Rex took down a book and Kenneth went on with his measuring. Without a word all had been said, and would never, never be to say again.

But Kenneth missed the car horribly. Busy as he was, until Rex should take Mrs. Wyecastle away he was in the main unoccupied. He couldn't hang about the Boys' Room all day long checking things that had already been checked a score of times, and his bedroom at the Maeterlinck was equally impossible. Besides, there was Par-par. Several times he had felt a virtuous glow of satisfaction that he could put his hand on his heart and honestly say that he had never even kissed her, neither out of idleness nor mischief nor in any other way. But for all that he wasn't quite comfortable about her. He wished he hadn't taken her about quite so much. Confound all people who got fond of you! They

meant well, but they got in your way with their very kindnesses. She oughtn't to have had bovril waiting for him when he came in at night; she ought to have been in bed. That was why he preferred Nini's company. That at least was strict business. Even if he did have a dinner at her place once in a while, new and appetising and with a spice of garlic somewhere in it, that wasn't like bovril; it didn't keep her up till two a.m. Besides, she was perfectly right about the dinners. For five shillings she could provide a meal that would have cost him fifteen, and a hundred-per-cent better meal at that. Also, the weather was beginning to have a bit of a nip in it at night. His bedroom at the Maeterlinck had no fireplace, he didn't want to worry old Rex when he was busy, and the little oilstove in her room, with its bit of crimson talc almost like the glow of a real fire, was cosy and always kept in beautiful trim—you wouldn't have known there was paraffin in the room at all. Efficient little creature! Of course she came of an efficient race. She was a good deal quietened down, too, at the joyous prospect of a regular job. It struck Kenneth forcibly that girls sometimes had to be even merrier and brighter than men. These things do strike you when you have had to go through them. You have a sort of fellow-feeling for those who have had to go through them too.

In the meantime he couldn't be always at Nini's place either. The Boys' Room and the Maeterlinck —Rex was busy in the one place, Par-par's eyes much too mutely reproachful in the other.

So, for a little while longer, he did as he had done before—looked in at Radleys', or at the place in Piccadilly, or at the place in Holborn with the blackboard, and was sometimes to be found in the betting-

place near Bond Street, where the tape-machine trickled out its tape, and the telephones in the next room broke into furious chorus, as if the air at the exchange had been surcharged with electricity.

III

" But dash it all, You "—he now called her " You " for Una—" can't a fellow make a joke ? "

If a fellow did he must do so at the very topmost pitch of his lungs, for the shattering roar of the Roadeater was such that without a megaphone the human voice would hardly carry to the car attached to the machine's side. She shook her head, in sign that she did not hear and did not intend to try. If he liked to make himself voiceless with bawling he might. In fact to have him voiceless would not be altogether a disadvantage. Then she would be able to collect her thoughts about him, which, to tell the truth, she had not yet done. His cocksure cheerfulness worried her dreadfully sometimes. Those silly little clichés of speech of his enveloped his thoughts, if he had any, just as his helmet and leather coat and elephant's legs enveloped his body, so that one could only guess at what lay behind either. And the more she tried to understand the more he " played up." Merely (as it seemed) to keep her on the hooks, he had lately revived an older cliché, older than the speech in " ings." This was to mix up the past tense with the past participle. She remembered how, as he, she and Mrs. Wyecastle had once taken tea together in the Boys' Room, a wasp had buzzed restlessly about, finally fanning his cheek with its invisibly-beating wings.

"Dash! That brute with the loud needle on nearly stinged me!" he had said.

"Stung, darling," Mrs. Wyecastle had mildly corrected.

"Stung," he had accepted the correction, with a tongue-in-the-cheek twinkle at Una.

And he had tricks of metathesis too. He would say "shoving-sape" when he meant shaving-soap (he shaved twice a week and mentioned it). Why couldn't he be simple? She had learned to be simple. The world was the place to teach you that, and she had seen a little of the world. She had been in business and had been engaged to be married. He, for all that ever escaped him, might still have been at his School of Mines, getting out his Rugger fixture-cards and wondering whether his wing-three-quarter would manage to catch the 2.12 at Victoria. He chattered without ceasing and did not say a single thing. She thought it exceedingly rude of him.

The London-Oxford road streamed into the Road-eater's maw. Even traffic hastening in the same direction seemed to be reversing violently and coming back to them. She wondered how he controlled the horrid thing; it seemed less wonderful that he should speed like a bullet to its target than that he should ever be able to stop again. But stop he did, at a place he wotted of. He took a package and a couple of thermos flasks from the side-car, garaged the bike at a roadside motor-engineer's, and—thank Heaven! —stripped off his helmet and leather coat and mammoth's legs and was visible to the eye again. They had a bare half-mile to walk. At the end of it they found themselves in a rarely-visited upland park, dotted with browning oaks, and commanding a view of so many counties that even the Eater's appetite must have had the edge taken off at the

mere sight of it altogether. They spread out their picnic-meal on the turf and fell to, she as hungrily as he.

"Now you can go on with what you were saying," she said.

But already what he had been saying seemed to have escaped his mercurial memory.

"I say," he cried enthusiastically, "couldn't you have a topping time on a polo-pony, bending in and out among those oaks?"

"I should have thought a pony was too fast for you," she retorted.

He affected to sigh. "They always did score off poor little Maurice, ever since his happy childhood's hour," he replied.

And that, in three words, was the footing they were on, the footing ten thousand other young people are on to-day. There may be emotion underneath, there must be emotion underneath; but it is seldom allowed to appear. We tear through our lives as the motor-bicycle tore through the country, seeing not a flower, not a bird, not a peep at a running brook nor an innocent creeping thing. "That's a lovely girl, wasn't she!" we say; yet surely that cannot be all. "We still appear to be the same, but—who can tell?—something may have gone, and something new and strange and still invisible may have come to take its place." That something is still invisible in these fresh young lives that do not yet know themselves. It has not yet reached simplicity. Its expressions are uneasy and hard. It bickers, retorts, conceals. It has not yet come into line with the old and beautiful ceremony. It may have worship in its heart, but its ritual is still to find.

Impossible that it should not find it. Perhaps it has already done so, and we older ones do not know

it. Were they not comely to look at, she cross and pouting at his mannerisms, he the lazy, teasing, laughing male? And suppose we are wrong after all, and there was nothing new whatever in it? The world never had any youth that was not their youth, never, in the whole series of its re-beginnings, had any re-birth that did not spring from them. Unless we humble our hearts before them there is no hope for ourselves. There is no hope for those fair and far-spread miles they saw from their upland park, with town and church and wood and stream and the bright September sun over all.

So what though they wrangled, rode on Roadeaters and drank from thermos flasks? They were contemporaries with themselves and with a rising glory to be.

IV

Kenneth Chacey took out his last pound note, flattened it out on the counter, and wrote across the back of it with a pencil the words "God send you back to me." Then he handed it to the fruiterer, received his paper bag of fruit and his change, and left the shop, laughing softly to himself.

It was actually the last pound in his possession for the moment, but he had endorsed it so merely in a spirit of casual humour. The position was not really as desperate as all that. On the contrary, things on the whole had a rosy look. That very day Blythe and Garstin had done a good stroke of work not only on his behalf, but on their own as well. It was necessary, pending the opening of the club, that

they should have a certain amount of money to be going on with. As directors, their honorariums had been fixed some time ago. Now leave to advance themselves a sum on account of this honorarium had been granted by the ladies whose money it was. The debt would have to be repaid, but—*mañana*; to-morrow would do to think of that. As Miss Massingham, learning the language, might have said, We have no mañanas when we want money to-day. And it occurred to Kenneth to speculate on the financial possibilities had the ladies *not* given their consent. He himself was scrupulously honest in matters of money, but why should not an honest man have the amusement of speculating on possibilities as well as anybody else? There would have been several ways out of the difficulty—had Kenneth *not* been honest. Lady Balland and Lady Howmuch had put up the money individually, not jointly. Either knew that the other had put up money, but neither saw the other's accounts. What easier—had Kenneth *not* been honest—than to play one off against the other? Need the accounts—had Kenneth *not* been honest—have been rendered on the same day? Why—had Kenneth *not* been honest—should not one account or the other always show a temporary balance, at the expense of the other for the time being? What else were business-men doing—supposing them *not* to be honest—when they ran two enterprises on the capital of one, or, better still, half a dozen on the capital of two? You simply pooled the lot the day before audit-day and transferred it back again the day after. Oh, there would have been ways out of it all right—had Kenneth *not* been honest.

Fortunately he was honest, barring such things as Mellins and Glaxo and a loose cigar or two.

More fortunately still, perhaps, the occasion did not arise.

So, though only the change of his last note remained in his pocket, all was well.

He came out of the fruit-shop into the same damnably penetrating rain. You saw it grey a little way about the lamp-heads, and it looked like going on all night. He couldn't be expected to walk, especially with a paper bag of fruit in his hand, and there was no taxi in sight. He had been the last customer in the shop, which had put up its shutters behind him. He was in a side-street off Westbourne Grove, and he had not bought the fruit because he had any idea of turning vegetarian. He was having supper with Nini. He might pick up a taxi as he went along, but on a wet night everybody wants a taxi. If he didn't find one he supposed he must walk. He wondered if anybody would hand over a two-seater to him on the same terms as the last one.

No taxi was to be had. Wet umbrellas passed him, and he wished he had an umbrella to hold over the paper bag. He did the best he could to cover it with his old trench Burberry. He approached Notting Hill Gate and the street where the Powis Laundry was. A man without an overcoat asked him for coppers, but he'd be hanged if he was going to unbutton and jeopardize the paper bag for anybody. " Sorry, old bean, but it's the same here," he said, and as likely as not the old bean believed him. He stopped before the gate with the broken spear-heads, walked up the path, whistled and waited.

Her room had dark blue linen blinds and he stepped back as one of them was pushed a couple of inches aside. He whistled two more soft notes. The chink of light disappeared again, and after a

moment he saw her candle and heard her steps descending the stairs. There was no need for secrecy. The landlady who did the plain sewing was aware of his visits. But she always seemed a little scared of him, almost curtsied when she met him, and referred to him (Nini said) as " the gentleman." He followed Nini and her candle up the narrow stairs, turned along the linoleum-covered landing, and followed her into the room.

The smell of the supper had lingered on the staircase up which she had carried it; now he had its full fragrance. She had borrowed an iron oven-tray from the gas stove in the kitchen, and this she had placed on her small oilstove, with the supper between hot plates on the top of it. A small oval gate-legged table, polished like glass, was set out with mats, and two cane-bottomed chairs were drawn up to it in readiness. Her deep basket-chair stood by the oil-stove, and the white-globed gas by the window made a staring moon against the night of the dark blue linen blinds. The little talc square of the stove glowed like a large-sized ruby, and the crimson curtains were drawn about her bed.

" But you are wet through, mon ami! " she exclaimed, putting her hand on his sodden sleeve. " Mon Dieu, I did not know it rain like that! "

" Coming down like stink," he replied. " I'd better put it out on the landing."

" No, I take it downstairs in the kitchen where it will dry. And your coat too! You must not sit in that—give it to me——"

She made him take it off, and departed with both garments. Presently she was back, behind the red curtain. She came out carrying a thick white shawl, at which he laughed.

" It is not to laugh—put it over your shoulders—

you do as I tell you—there is nobody here but me——"

She placed the shawl about him, and busied herself with the serving of supper.

She had on the same black satin frock; if she possessed another he had never seen it. Or perhaps she had two identical ones. Her fur coat and the hat with the imitation osprey feather he knew to be hanging behind the small triangular curtained recess behind the door. She had once told him that she had to spend more money on her shoes than on the rest of her wardrobe put together, and he had *not* asked her whether she ever drilled them. He was sorry for people who were made to do things with their feet that they didn't want to do. That was why he hated walking. Food, warmth and no walking—that was the stuff to give the troops!

"M'sieu' est servi," Nini said with a little stagey gesture; and they sat down.

Of course it was a strictly-business dinner. There were many little things on which she was already busily engaged—odds and ends such as making jazz cushion-covers (a partially-made one lay on the floor by her basket-chair), foolish little mascots tied with ribbon, notes for supper-menus, and a dozen other feminine devices. The accounts for the materials for these she kept neatly filed for his inspection. Her own figures included those funny little French 7's. Several times she rose to get him a paper, leaning over his shoulder as he read it. She found hints for the club even in the colours of the grapes and bananas and oranges he had brought. Then she rose to make coffee, which she ground herself, or rather he ground for her, poking the last beans down into the little mill with his finger.

"I shall roast it every day for the club," she said,

taking the heated jug from the oven-tray on the oilstove. " I always roast it where I come from, in France."

And even then he didn't ask her where that had been.

He would not admit why he so obstinately refused to ask her these questions about herself. He put the whole matter almost violently out of his thoughts, giving himself any reason rather than the true one. What business of his was it where she had been brought up, who her parents had been, what her schooling, what had brought her to England, what had been her subsequent career? And let all these things be whatever they might have been, was he going to set himself up as her judge? Had certain passages of his own life been very much to brag about? And he wasn't calling his attitude to her by any fine names either. It was not tolerance, charity, generosity or love of any kind. It was simply minding his own business and letting her mind hers. Moreover, if there was one woman in the world he must not act the fool with it was the woman with whom he was going to be in daily business-contact. No playing with fire for Kenneth. These were things to be kept severely apart. So he deluded himself.

The plain truth was that he was afraid to ask her anything whatever about herself. She might tell him. And he didn't want to know.

He shut his eyes to the direction in which his refusal to know pointed.

She had cleared away everything but the coffee and the fruit, placing the remains of the repast, together with the iron oven-tin, in the passage outside the door. As he was coatless, she made him retain her shawl and take the basket-chair. The only other chairs she possessed were the two upright cane-bottomed

ones. She curled herself up on the floor at his feet, using the end of his chair as a back-rest. One shoulder peeped out of the black satin, white and round as a billiard-ball, refusing to go into its pocket. She looked very small, curled up to half her size at his knee, with the over-pointed fingers straying to the shoulder once in a while. He remembered the day when he had given her anchovy sandwiches. Poor little devil, how she had needed them! And now she was feeding him, with food such as he got nowhere else, fresh, a change, like the pleasant eating of somebody else's bread after that to which one has become accustomed in one's own household. It must be her touch, he supposed. She certainly possessed a touch in everything she did. And by Jove, she could make coffee! He asked her for some more, and she got it for him, resuming her former attitude. He gave her a cigarette and a light, and she looked smilingly round.

"You see I remembaire."

"Remember what?"

"What you told me a long time ago, how to light a cigarette. I put my head up and my feathaire out of the way and wait—but I have now no feathaire——"

He had completely forgotten. So much water had passed under the bridge since that morning in the Boys' Room, when he had come upon her giving Rex his dancing-lesson, and had borne her off to the sofa and had shown her the one about the H's. It struck him a little. Casually enough it had begun, and it wasn't going to end after any very different fashion, but he did not deny that he was now fond of her. She had had a rotten time, and he was glad he had stood by her. Let it go at that. Kenneth would be matey with whom he pleased. He patted the billiard-ball

of a shoulder, and his hand remained on it. She settled a little towards his knee. Her own hand did not meet his.

But suddenly, impulsively, something else did. It was her mouth. Just as she had kissed his hand that other dawn by the broken gate outside, so she kissed it now, sinking her head to do so as a bird tucks away its head almost within itself. It was pure gratitude and devotion. The lips on his hand seemed to tell him that she would cook for him, dance for him, superintend his club for him, sew on his buttons for him, die for him.

And suddenly she put it all into broken words. She swung round where she crouched, and passed her arms under his knees. She kissed his knees again and again.

"Nobody has evaire been so good to me!" she murmured, her voice stifled on the knees.

"That's all right, babelet," he answered cheerfully, his hand on the bent head.

"I nevaire knew a man like you——"

"Lucky for them I should say. Is there any more coffee?"

But this time she did not rise to get him more coffee. Instead she buried her face on his knees and sobbed, unexpectedly and unrestrainedly.

"Oh, oh! And to think that you nevaire once asked me a question!"

"A question? What about?" he asked.

"I have not been a wicked girl—it is not wicked if you know all——"

Damn! (he thought). Now she was beginning, like Par-par.

"I say, Nini, this won't do, you know," he said.

"No, no, I know. But if you knew—rien de rien de rien de rien—it was not Nini——"

" Now look here, just you pull yourself together."

" And you nevaire ask even one question! Oh, mon chèr, mon chèr! "

She started suddenly up and flung her face upon his breast.

" Now don't be a fool," he curtly ordered her. " Get it over, and then get up."

" Oh, I love you, I love you! "

" All right. But get up."

" It would be my wish nevaire to get up again! Oh, mon chèr, mon chèr! "

Of itself his cheek had found her hair. His arms were passed about her. What else could he do but comfort her? Poor little devil! Such humiliating gratitude, for an ordinary decency that he would not have denied any passer-by! Christ, how she must have been used! Let her head stay where it was; it might stay there all night for all Kenneth would do to send it away! He almost told her to have a little nap. Her sobbing was becoming quieter already. That was better! Let her get it over.

And let him take care that it didn't happen again.

But all at once she turned in his arms and fastened her mouth passionately to his.

" Darleeng! " she breathed against his lips. " Darleeng! " she whispered. " Darleeng! " she wooed him.

Then he was returning her kisses.

What did it matter after all? What did anything matter? Take what you can while you can get it; was there any other way? He could guess what she meant about his not asking questions. Who was *he* to ask her questions anyway? What was *his* daily life? He was a slacker and a waster, no good, a spendthrift who lacked only the money to spend. He would never be any good. It wasn't the times he

lived in at all. It was himself, and he would never be any different. So why make a fuss? Whatever she had been she was good enough for him. Not another soul alive would ever so adore him. Now that it had begun it would certainly go on. Let it go on.

"You're really rather a sweet little kid, you know," he murmured to the clinging lips.

"Oh, I love you! I belong to you every bit! I love you!"

Let it go on. At least it would make her happy. Happiness—though only in a room such as this, only with a fellow such as he—that was the stuff to give the troops!

"You love me a little?" she wheedled.

Food, warmth, somebody to make a fuss of you, somebody you can make happy——

It was raining like stink outside, and he had no car——

Kenneth was damned if he was going to walk home——

III

GHOSTS

The Boys' Room was not yet available for Kenneth's purpose, but Rex could not continue to pack up without substantially changing its appearance. The old guns still remained above the mantelpiece, but

half the pictures had been taken down. The rugs and mats were still on the floor, but more and more camouflaged packing-cases stood among them. The curtains remained, but beyond them, outside in the area, were several bundles in sacking, which were Kenneth's. Also a short ladder leaned against the wall by the chimney-breast, and, though they were more or less regularly gathered up by Edwards, balls of crumpled newspaper for packing were often to be found lying about.

With the place so altered by Rex himself, there seemed no reason why, short of having the workmen in, Kenneth should not take a hand also. The packages outside in the area were from Harrowbys', recently arrived. People also came and went—the little Frenchwoman who apparently was to be the club's manageress, Winifred Harrowby, Blythe, Garstin, others. Mrs. Wyecastle did not seem to mind in the least. She sat and knitted as usual, had her afternoon's lie-down as usual, her hot milk of an evening, and went at her usual hour to bed. Rex's fears for her peace of mind seemed to have been quite wasted, and so Kenneth's convenience might be the more safely studied.

One evening, with the room in this half-transformed state, Rex and his mother sat there, alone. He had been writing letters, she placidly knitting. She never appeared to know for whom she knitted; she merely knitted. A wood fire burned behind the old iron dogs, and only half the electric lights were switched on. Neither Rex nor Mrs. Wyecastle had spoken for some time. Rex gathered his letters together, stamped them, placed them in a little pile, and rose, yawning.

"Well, mother, isn't it getting near your bedtime?" he said.

" I'll just do two more rows, dear."

" Not more, mind. Well, I'll be getting a few more things together."

He looked about him, wondering where to begin. As he did so one of the few remaining photographs caught his eye. Probably it had been overlooked on account of its mere obviousness, for it was the one of himself in the spiny Cingalese frame low down by the chimney-breast. Rex advanced and took it from its nail. As he did so something fell with a little knock to the floor and rolled away.

He stooped, and picked up the ring he had given to Una Paull—the ring for which Kenneth had so diligently searched. It must have remained lodged on some point of carving on the frame or on some projection behind it ever since.

At the low cry of pain he was unable to control his mother looked up.

" What is it, dear? " she asked.

" Nothing, mother."

" I thought you spoke."

" No."

" Mrs. Harrowby," Edwards announced.

" May I come in? "

Without waiting for an answer Winifred Harrowby advanced along the gallery.

If she had made the old furniture and table-fittings look shabby before, now the partially-dismantled room might have been a railway-station waiting-room for dinginess, by contrast with her and her magnificence. She wore a rich evening wrap glossy and black as a beetle, and its turned-back lining seemed a sheet of fluctuating gold. She seemed the very type of triumphant material success, queening it over failure and decay. But the voice in which she asked if Kenneth was in was as soft as ever, and the

gesture with which she took Mrs. Wyecastle's hand as charmingly deferential.

" How are you, dear Mrs. Wyecastle? And so it's to be the South of France! Oh, how I envy you! I'm lucky if I can steal a week-end from my wretched business! And how are you, Rex? "

She might have seen how he was, and possibly did. He had slipped the ring into his pocket, but she had intruded on his very groan. Mechanically he placed one of the faded chairs for her, and that insolent sheet of gold enveloped it, with her throat, arms and million-sequined black frock arrogantly against it.

" I understood Kenneth was to be here? " she said. " Do you happen to know if any things have come for him from my place? "

" There are some packages out there," said Rex.

She was on her feet, the lining of the cloak billowing like golden corn in a summer storm.

" Outside! In the damp! My *dear* Rex! Why, they're fabrics! Please, please bring them in instantly! "

Rex said something about being sorry—they had only arrived that afternoon and had been placed there without his knowledge. He put a small shawl about his mother's shoulders, drew the curtains, and opened the glass doors. One by one he carried the packages in. Then he closed the doors again.

" And now, dear Mrs. Wyecastle, I know you'd love to see them! " said Winifred Harrowby. " They're really the very last word in their kind! I trust the damp hasn't got at them. May I? "

She reached for Mrs. Wyecastle's basket of wools, and from it took a pair of scissors. A couple of the parcels were sewn up in sacking, the others were wrapped in thick brown paper. Mrs. Harrowby cut the string of one of the brown paper ones. It had

more paper inside, and tissue-paper after that. From the innermost wrapping she took out a couple of violently-hued cushions, jazzed and freaked and harlequined. She punched them with her ringed hands, smoothed them, and buried her face in them.

"*Pour Troubler*," she said as she sniffed. "And the other should be *Nuits d'Apache*."

Rex turned to his mother. "Mother, dear, your bedtime," he said.

But Mrs. Wyecastle was looking rather stupidly at the cushion. It seemed to draw her tired old eyes. Certainly objects so much of the very latest minute of to-day could hardly find any response in her memory, yet somehow one might almost have fancied they did. Mrs. Harrowby carried one of the cushions to her for her to smell its perfume. The old lady took it in her slack hands.

"That's the *Nuits d'Apache* one. If I'd been Kenneth I think I should have stuck to one perfume throughout, but it's a doubtful point, and he may be right."

"Is it for here?" Mrs. Wyecastle asked.

"It's for the club, of course," said Mrs. Harrowby.

"The club?"

Winifred Harrowby raised an inquiring eyebrow to Rex, as much as to say, What was this? Could Mrs. Wyecastle's memory be failing? She knew perfectly well all about the club. She had discussed the club, placidly, amiably, with Mrs. Harrowby herself. But there she sat looking at the cushion, and saying inquiringly, "The club?"

"Mother, I'm going to put you to bed at once," said Rex, stepping forward.

Mrs. Harrowby nodded to him comprehendingly. Perhaps it would be the best.

But, "The club?" said Mrs. Wyecastle once more.

"Oh, I shouldn't have opened them!" Mrs. Harrowby said in distress. "I'm *so* sorry! It was so clumsy of me! Do, do forgive me!"

But Mrs. Wyecastle was looking away from the cushion, about the room. Her eyes settled on a space of blank panelling. Her voice trembled.

"Rex, what have they been doing to the room? Somebody's been taking the pictures down."

"Oh, what have I done!" wailed Winifred Harrowby.

"Somebody's been taking the pictures down, Rex. Are they cleaning?"

The old lady had seemed on the point of rising. Rex put a gently restraining hand on her arm and looked across at Winifred Harrowby.

"You have a long memory," he said quietly.

"What can you mean, Rex?" said Mrs. Harrowby in a tone of astonishment.

"And a very bitter one."

"Really, I begin to wish I hadn't come!"

"Come, mother dear," said Rex, bending over Mrs. Wyecastle again.

"Can I be of any help?" Mrs. Harrowby proffered.

Rex's eyes were mournfully on those of his visitor. There was no anger in his tone.

"You could have been—by staying away," he said.

"That," said Mrs. Harrowby stiffly, "is a little impolite. I came to see Kenneth, on business. Either you've handed over to him or you haven't. I was told that you had."

"Very well."

"But it *isn't* very well if you're going to use that tone to me. At least I wish to know where I stand."

"Will you excuse us? Here's an evening paper."

"And what do you mean by my long memory? That's another gratuitous thing you've said."

"My mother is very tired."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Harrowby, turning. "I don't need anything plainer than that. As the member of the family I came to see doesn't appear to be here I won't stay."

She swept the glorious cloak about her and made as if to depart.

But she got no further than the gallery steps. Something stronger than herself seemed suddenly to seize and possess her. Again the cloak billowed as she swung round.

"And there's something that *you* would do very well to hear, Rex Wyecastle, too!" she cried, and the swift sweep of arm and cloak seemed to comprehend the whole room. "Why did you go to all this trouble?"

"To all——?" He did not understand.

"What made you set up this sham? Wasn't there anything newer to do? Something not *quite* as far back as the Middle Ages?" She broke into laughter. "But there! You always did live in a vacuum! Shutting yourself up and pretending nothing's altered! Why"—her tone changed to contempt—"when a thing's dead why can't you bury it instead of trying to embalm it? But you set up this Temple Hazard sham instead! Didn't it occur to you that all this rubbish was swept away by the war? Do you think you're going to bring *those* days back with a couple of dummy beams and a few pieces of imitation panelling?"

Deliberately she stepped forward, past Mrs. Wyecastle, whose gaze was still vacantly on the walls.

"Do you want to see? Look! Listen!"

And with her ringed hand she struck a piece of plasterwork by the side of the chimney.

There was a sound of falling pieces behind. Mrs. Wyecastle's hand went suddenly to her heart, as if that too had been struck.

"Listen!" the soft-voiced Mrs. Harrowby shrilled out. "Do you hear it? Listen to it! Like rats! And there goes the date *you* lived in, Rex Wyecastle! There go the times *you* tried to make stand still!" A secondary fall was heard. "Listen! And there goes everything unless you come out of your paper world and look facts in the face! Time somebody did dance here! This papier-mâché! Oh, you dear old-fashioned people who live in vacuums!"

Rex's arm was protectingly about his mother, but he confronted the shrill woman in the gorgeous cloak.

"You came to say this," he said.

She mocked him. "I wonder if you really *do* know what I mean!"

"I think I do."

"What do I mean?"

"I know I did lend your husband money. I thought it right"—there was a pathetic little echo of the old official as unconsciously he hastened to qualify—"at the time, and in view of the then circumstances——"

"Oh, you and what you think's right!"

Then her tone changed to ringing scorn of him.

"So you think it was that? You think it was old scores? You think I've owed you a grudge for that? Do you think I wanted anything better than to see the last of the old fool? Why, you did me the best turn of my life!" Then she let him have it point-blank, with the cloaked arm pointing directly at him. "And how old are you, Rex Wyecastle? Fifty!

And she was barely twenty! Fifty and twenty! You may well say the war made you younger!"

"You don't even spare me that."

"Spare!" she cried vehemently. "And what would you have spared her? Oh, I've been through that mill, and I know! Do you think I was going to stand by and see a young creature used as I was used? Oh, you talked her round! I saw it all happening! We all think it's wonderful the first time we hear it! But let me tell you that being married's a matter of detail! Why didn't you marry at the right time and take a chance like everybody else?"

"I've nothing to say."

"No, that's what you'd expect from a vacuum—nothing! Time they did dance! Kenneth has sense. There's a good deal of his father about Kenneth. At any rate he looks facts in the face. You might tell him I called."

She was half-way along the gallery. She turned and apostrophized the Boys' Room.

"Dear, romantic vacuum! It was very nice once! But just a little fresh air—just a little fresh air——"

And, shaking the dust from her feet, she was gone.

Mrs. Wyecastle's gaze had dropped from the walls. She sat, with the scrap of shawl about her shoulders, looking down past her knees. Suddenly she lifted her head and said, in a conversational tone, "Isn't Ronnie in yet? He said he was bringing Fairy and Gwen."

Rex took her into his arms. "Mother," he said brokenly, "I'm here."

"Let me see, Fairy is the *very* fair one, isn't she?"

But Mrs. Wyecastle probably felt nothing at all. They were but the fragmentary rainbow-ends of that non-existent bridge with which her memory sought to

span The Gap. In packing up the room Rex was not packing up an old woman's heart also. That had been packed up and sealed long ago.

She suffered herself to be led quietly away.

The Boys' Room was empty for perhaps five minutes. At the end of that time voices and feet were heard, and another mixed sound, as of a soft booming and jingling. Kenneth's voice was heard calling "Anybody down there?" He appeared, followed by Blyth, Garstin, Craddock the sallow Engineer, and Nini.

"Nobody at home by the look of it," he said. "Well, bring it in."

The thing that was carried in by Garstin and Craddock was a gaudy jazz-band big drum, with cymbals and triangle and fittings complete. The soft and minatory booming and jingling continued to reverberate in time to their steps as it was brought down.

"I say, Edwards!" Kenneth called behind him. "Let's have some sandwiches, will you? And is my uncle at home?"

"He's somewhere in the house, Mr. Kenneth."

"All right. Let him know I'm here if you see him. I hope he won't mind, but we couldn't miss a chance like that," he added to the others. "And—oh, good!" His eyes had fallen on the cushions and the parcels sewn up in sacking. "Those things have come. You might be unpacking them, Nini."

"May we smoke?"

"Of course. Dump those other things anywhere —on the piano'll do—put a newspaper over it first——"

The newspaper was spread on the top of the grand piano, and the "other things" were placed upon it —a couple of dozen or so of stone match-stands, as

many copper ash-trays, a number of menu-holders and bridge-markers, and other club fittings. Blythe carried a roulette-board under his single arm. All were second-hand, but in good condition. The disposal was hardly completed before Rex reappeared. Kenneth went straight up to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, old chap," he said, "I know it's filling the place up horribly, but it's this way. I only heard of it yesterday, and the auction was this afternoon. Of course I hared it as fast as I could go. Even then a lot of the things had gone. And I simply didn't know where else to put 'em. Would they be very much in the way?"

Already Rex's eyes had fallen on the objects on the piano-top and the drum beneath.

"Electric light inside too—dirt cheap!" said Kenneth. "Do you mind? Is it all right?"

"Quite," said Rex.

"Sure grannie won't mind?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, it's awfully good of you—lets me out of a hole. You know Garstin and Blythe and Craddock, don't you?"

"Yes. And Mademoiselle."

"And I've asked Edwards for a few sandwiches. Is that all right?"

"Perfectly. Do you want me for anything? I think I shall go out and post my letters."

Rex took the little pile of letters, wished them good night, and left them.

Nini was on her hands and knees, busily opening the Harrowby packages. The two in sacking contained each a pouffe, black, yellow, green, livid and barbarous. The larger of the brown paper parcels was full of curtains and hangings, even more terrify-

ingly patterned. These she held tucked up under her chin, or laid out over the packing-cases or the furniture or on the floor, with ecstatic exclamations. Then she ran for the short ladder by the side of the chimney-breast. Using a couple of the stone match-stands as weights, she draped there a curtain so inordinate that it was less covered with a pattern than with a pandemonium of raving design. She descended the ladder again and tripped back to look at it.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" was all that she could breathe, her hands clasped under her chin.

"Now where's my attaché-case? We'll run through the subscription-list," said Kenneth.

The four men grouped themselves, three on the sofa and one on one of Rex's nailed-down cases, and went earnestly into figures, while Nini continued to adore the fabrics.

There entered Edwards, carrying a large tray of jingling glasses, siphons, and piled-up plates of sandwiches. Kenneth looked up from his calculations.

"Right, Edwards, we'll see to them. Nini, you might just pour us out a drink."

"But first I put these away—I put them all in the paper again—the dust, *mon Dieu!* I know you men, with your drinks and your cigarettes——"

They continued their discussion while she repacked the fabrics, chattering to herself for mere joy. "The lovely *étoffes!* They throw their ash on them, these men—and to see the way they waste the electricité! I stir the fire, yes? And now I switch off thees, and thees——"

She snapped a couple of switches. The Boys' Room was a warm half-glow of firelight and the remaining lamps. Then Nini mounted the ladder again to take

down that monstrous piece of design from the mantelpiece.

Suddenly her shriek rang out, and as suddenly each of the four men gave an involuntary curse.

She was up the ladder, pointing. She was pointing to the window at the back, the curtains of which were only partly drawn. Every head had turned.

Then Kenneth darted forward as the ladder tottered, and caught her in his arms as she fell. The two stone match-stands came down with a couple of heavy thuds.

"*Un fantôme—O mon cœur!*" came hardly audibly from Nini.

Tragic and ghostly through the dark panes, a small, pale, aged figure had been seen for a moment outside the window. It was Mrs. Wyecastle in her night-attire, looking in on them. And with a low cry, hardly heard, and a shaky raising of the old arms, the figure was gone almost as soon as it was seen.

"Water, somebody, quick," said Kenneth.

Nini's head was in his arms as he knelt on the floor.

"She'll be all right in a minute."

But Nini, with eyes closed, could only murmur faintly, "*Si spectrale*—I do not like it—there are ghosts here——"

IV

YOU TAKE A FELLOW

You take a fellow like Blythe, for example. He had his troubles, but they might have been worse. They had, as a matter of fact, been very much worse. In the matter of a lodging, before he had attained the comparative security of nearly always having half-a-home, often a home, quite frequently a home-and-a-half, and sometimes two homes with power to take in a lodger, he had, in an extreme vicissitude, twice found himself without a home at all. He had then gone to the Sidings Hotel, which is a quarter of a mile or so outside Paddington Station, clear of the Main Line, where one may have one's choice of First or Third for the same price—nothing. Things had looked up considerably since then, and he might presently have a permanent home, and a regal one at that, if Lady Howmuch did take it into her head to make him her full private-secretary and he spent his time between Portman Square, where the Golden Horn boudoir was, and her principality in the New Forest.

Or you take a fellow like Sykes—"Psyche," and one of Kenneth's old Colonels—who had hailed Kenneth one day at Hyde Park Corner. He had hailed him from the driver's seat of a mammoth char-à-banc. "Hoi, Chacey!" Sykes had cried. "I thought I knew the back of that head!" And Kenneth hadn't believed his ears when Psyche had

told him all about it. At one time Psyche had been pretty nearly down-and-out too, but that day he had shown Kenneth his ribbons—D.S.O. (which Kenneth also had), both South Africans, King's and Queen's, M.C. (with a bar), M.M., D.C.M., the usual four-and-a-half-years' rainbow, and somewhere in the gay little garden a Palm blooming—Mentioned in Despatches. Psyche wore them all on the lapel of his white driver's coat, and so did the fellows associated with him, the drivers of the other five chars-à-bancs. For " Tips ! " Psyche had whispered, and winked, and let it go at that. All that Psyche now wanted in the firm was a V.C. He owned six chars-à-bancs, all paid for to the last penny, and the profits of the concern (tips of course included) were something like a couple of thousand pounds a year. He had had a Cup Tie crowd on board on the day when Kenneth met him, and Cup Tie crowds, he said, were particularly generous. He expected to take twenty pounds that day on five chars-à-bancs only, over and above fares. And he kept, for luck, the buttons and the farthings that were sometimes tossed into his black-peaked cap. So all was going well with Psyche too.

Or you take a fellow like Garstin. Garstin and Kenneth had shared a dug-out, and Kenneth was very fond of Garstin. And Garstin, somehow, always managed to get away with it out of sheer sincerity and honesty. It was precarious, of course—most things were precarious—but unless Garstin sacked himself nobody was ever very likely to sack him. That was always a mystery to Kenneth. He was moderately and workably honest himself, but he didn't pretend for a moment that his honesty was his principal asset. He had to have his wits about him too. But Garstin, who had a beautiful tired sort of voice, and sometimes talked to you almost as

if he was going to sleep, was simply never disbelieved. Lady Balland might be cross with him sometimes, but she never disbelieved him. Whatever he said, though it were only to tell her that to speak of a serviette when you meant a napkin was (unless you had a familiar knowledge of French, which Lady Balland had not) an affectation, was sure to be right. And Lady Balland was going to be somebody very considerable in the world, and was going, if Garstin could manage it, to take him up with her. So Garstin hadn't much to grumble at either.

Or you took a fellow like Craddock. Craddock, in a sense, was just Garstin turned the other way round, with Kenneth himself somewhere in between. Craddock too was honest enough, but he was as cunning as the devil as well. You had to get up early to put it past Craddock. Craddock had come out of the awkwardest corners by tightrope-walking and sheer skill. He knew patent law backwards, and when that little syndicate had floated that device for the change-gear—but that change-gear enterprise always had been miles out of Kenneth's depth. On the face of it it had looked like sailing rather dangerously close to the wind, yet not a single dishonest thing had been done or said by Craddock. Wonderful chap Craddock, if only he could have got to work on a bigger scale. He was now running a Travelling Bureau and Courier Agency, for which he provided the skill and somebody else the money, and was doing very well out of it, as long as it lasted. So, up to date, Craddock hadn't very much to complain about either.

Or for that matter you could take almost any fellow you knew. Except for the lost men, hardly anybody was so badly off that he couldn't have been worse. Perhaps it wasn't all they wished, but it

wasn't nothing at all. Kenneth, in his way, was not without a certain working philosophy.

But while you may take this man or that, it is another matter when you take them in numbers. You take a fellow like Rex. That was where Rex had gone wrong, and was now too old to go right again. He hadn't taken a fellow. He had taken too many of them, and in the end had had to go to school to his nephew. Comparatively few men knew the large and basic difficulties as Rex knew them, the gigantic efforts that were being made to grapple with them, the midnight hours devoted public servants spent at their toil, their snatched dinners, their make-shift beds in the offices, their instant summonses to another part of the country, their overdue leave gone west, their brain-fag, their eye-fag, their utter physical fatigue. Many of their labours, perhaps the greatest of them, were not at present disclosable. And few knew, as Rex knew them, the momentous decisions that did not rest with this country at all. He was still too weary to think much about it all. But already he surmised that all was wasted unless the mere human problem—the problem of these fellows Blythe and Garstin and his nephew—was first clearly seen.

For suppose Lady Howmuch had taken it into her head to sack Blythe? Suppose that Garstin, fed to the back teeth, should resign from the service of Lady Balland? Suppose that Craddock, so airily poised, should one day make a slip and take a toss? Then more heads would bob up and down in the raging river of To-day, more bubbles would tell of a man gone under—*spurlos versenkt*. How are you going to handle a thousand men if you don't know one of them—what he wants, where he lives, what his clothes, how much his meals cost, how much

money he has in his pocket, where he gets it from, what are his ambitions, what his love. Not by ignoring these things were armies held together. The company officer who best knew all these things about his men would best get them to follow him anywhere. Many such, who had been father and mother and adviser and friend to their men, still existed on earth. Those close bonds may be attentuated as far as Australia, but they are inseverable. They were welded in an unimaginable furnace. And one thing is certain—that you cannot take numbers of men, use them after such-and-such a fashion, and have everything afterwards exactly as it was before.

Or you take—if you can see his heels for dust—a fellow like young Maurice Chacey. Maurice did not make a single one of these troubles, but he will have them to cure. And if he and Una Paull marry and have sons, the battle for those sons will be won. The " something new and strange and invisible " will then be plainly seen. But the chances are that young Maurice Chacey still looks on Una Paull as one of the most amusing girls for a leg-pull he knows. He gets what he calls " value " out of Una. It has not yet occurred to him how dreadfully he would miss her were she to get engaged to somebody else. She is further on the road to simplicity than he, and probably her eyes will be opened first.

Or for that matter you take the Roadeater. That terrific engine could drive a four-seater car, but all that it is called upon to do at present is to shoot, like a torpedo without a war-head, across the counties and back again, carrying those two and their packed-up luggage of energy and immaturity and laughter and quarrelling and hope all bundled up together. You take the roadside inns and garages they stop at or the uplands parks of their picnics. All that they

see will belong to them and to their generation to-morrow, and there is brightness and exhilaration even in the reek of their exhaust. But the Road-eater is for the present in dock. She tried to swallow too huge a gobbet even for her constitution of steel, loitering on top half-way up Box Hill, blew her back cylinder thirty feet into the air, as near as a touch putting an end to them and their hopes on the spot. So if Maurice had formerly shown satisfaction at the speed and accuracy with which he had diagnosed the ailment of Miss Mollie Sutherland's coupé, he must now ruefully put his hand into his own pocket.

And you take the music of which the town is so full. That is one of the most annoying difficulties of all. The fellow without a coat who asked Kenneth for coppers on that rainy night when Kenneth was far too carefully trussed up to bother—you take that fellow. He may have been genuine or he may not. He may have been of the kind who reels off his regimental number and record in your teeth before you have had time to look at him, or he may have been a poor devil, finally routed out from the last hole or cellar where he had tried to hide his poverty and shame. He might have smelt of whisky because he was a drunkard, or because he was desperate. He might have crawled to sleep in an area after Kenneth had left him, or he might have crawled to a longer sleep in the River. Few of his kind have the disarming candour of the other fellow, who one day accosted Kenneth and told him that he was an old soldier and wanted the price of a drink.

And the trouble of Government is that in the end it may be impossible for it to take a man. Only a man can take a man. So you take a fellow like Kenneth Chacey. You can take him any moment of the day, in a Tube, or on a bus-top, as he tools past

you in a two-seater if ever he has one again, or in a betting place or in a bar. Kenneth, with all his faults, is loyal to his pals. He did his best not to let his uncle down. He wouldn't go behind Blythe's back or Garstin's for worlds. He is fond of his grandmother, and not now because she slips a treasury note into his hand from time to time—for she is now with Rex in the South of France. She is at peace, and has no more recollection of a Gap than if there had never been one. If it was for his own luck rather than the recipient's, Kenneth did throw a street-musician or a female pavement-artist a sixpence once in a while. He had bought Nini sandwiches, just as he would have bought them for any other hungry little kid he had met once, and he loathed the idea of her being seen in those so-raidable dancing-places. If he scrounged his uncle's cigars, they were not all for his own smoking. His fingers might be stained. His daily habits might not be very much to write home about. He might hate work that was chosen for him as he hated walking or seeing the sun rise. But he did know one half of Mr. Kipling's "If," and had his own standards. When you take Kenneth you take an average, thriftless, easy-going, living-on-his-wits sort of fellow, but also one who would be decent if you would be decent, and get on well enough with you as long as you weren't positively shabby to him. And Kenneth at any rate never made up a theory about life and then tried to cram the living facts into it.

Or you can take any village or town up and down the country, or you can take London itself. Things are in the saddle, and only ideas are stronger than things. Or you take skywriting. Surely that to-day should be more than the advertisement of a commodity trailed by a Skyeater across the sky above

St. Paul's. An idea should be trailed, or perhaps something greater even than an idea. We will not call that thing that is greater than an idea Brotherhood or Love. Our Time dislikes these manifestations too straight from the heart. So say there were written across London's sky something in the form of a toast—" All the best—God bless—Cheerioh ! " Or you take broadcasting. You take the home-erected apparatus you see in every alternate back garden as you travel out of London, with masts of stick and bamboo, fastened to eaves and blackened larches and chimney-pots. What is it the dwellers in those countless homes really want to know ? Not concerts from the Albert or Queen's Halls. Not the stage-thunder of politicians from Marconi House. Not good-night stories told to the children. What is it they really want to know, these million hearts, not one of them the same as it was ten years ago ? What do they get ? And what is it they are hungering and fainting for ?

You take the problem as it is, and not as it is made to appear to be.

And you find out.

Or you take—as jerkily and disconnectedly as you please, for jerkiness and disconnection are appropriate to the Time—you take dancing. You take Kenneth's club. Let us take Kenneth's club.

V

THE KIT BAG

The Boys' Room throbbed and thrilled with the rhythm of the drum and the flourishes of the Swanee whistle. It was early yet—hardly midnight—and the people from the theatres had not yet arrived. The room was hardly recognizable, so complete was the transformation. It was brilliant, yet soft, with bizarre hanging lamps, extravagant curtains, palms and flowers here and there, and light screens making alcoves along the walls. A circular door with leaves revolved now and then at the back as a newcomer entered, and through its glass panels coloured bulbs could be seen, outlining the covered path across the garden. Along the high mantelpiece, where the old guns had been, was a row of futurist toys, with a shabby old kit-bag symbolically in the middle. The musicians and the three waiters, Edwards among them, were dressed as pierrots, but grotesque yellowish-brown pierrots, almost khaki-coloured, with frills of the same brownish material frothing about their ears. Eight or ten couples were dancing, and others sat in the screened alcoves or passed back and forth along the gallery to the rooms upstairs. The men wore tails and white ties, or else plain dinner-jackets, but the ladies were the centre of the picture. A few only of them were young. The others seemed to be made of backs, bosoms and no necks, or else were of exactly the opposite build. They were pearl-

roped, diamonded, gemmed, powdered, and their partners were conspicuously younger than they. Kenneth had started, at any rate, where the money was. So far his club was a novelty. A flash of magnesium went up—a photograph had been taken. It was followed by another flash, and the fumes hung in the air.

In one of the alcoves a richly-stripped woman was having a row with a one-armed man. Her voice was strident, but many of the voices about her were strident too, and its shrillness passed unnoticed. There was an anxious look on Blythe's face. Much was at stake.

"She only offered me a lift out of ordinary politeness—I really didn't quite catch what you said over the telephone," he was sincerely explaining. Lady Howmuch sometimes was a little difficult to understand on the telephone. "There's really no cause for all this."

"Well, you'd better make up your mind which it's to be, her or me!" the shrill voice scolded.

"I'm sincerely sorry. It was the merest accident."

"I suppose it was the Rolls she fetched you in! I never saw anything like the way you men won't look at anything but a Rolls nowadays! I could buy her and her Rolls twenty times over and more!"

Blythe made a further struggle to save that hoped-for private-secretaryship.

"I give you my word, Lady Howmuch, that I really didn't understand the appointment, and Mrs. Hunter was coming, and I couldn't decently say no to her."

"Yes, and there she is, looking at you now!" cried Lady Howmuch of Ware. "Catty piece! And only a 'Mrs.'! *Oh!*" She jumped suddenly up, kicking her chair away. "You'd better go to her

and her Rolls! And you can 'ave a day off to-morrow! I'll think about it whether you need come again! It'll take a bit of getting-over, this will! "

Lady Howmuch stamped across the room, leaving Blythe sitting there, wondering whether his innocent acceptance of a lift from another woman meant the end of all things.

The dance ended, and there was a hurrying along the gallery and a scurry for the alcoves. One of these was seized by a sallow young man and a thin-throated lady who, before sitting down, drew the leaf of the light screen a little more closely round. The young man's head appeared round the narrowed opening.

" Hoi! You there! Edwards! " he cried. " Two Grands Marniers! "

Edwards had his orders. In bringing the liqueurs and waiting to see to which of them he was to hand the chit for signature he moved the screen back to its original position with his foot.

" I say, you pay for everything, you know," the sallow young man protested as the lady took the bill from the salver.

" Pooh! "

" Well, you'll have to come and dine with me next week. Those THE pearls, Poppy? "

" Not the big rope. Only a few I wear."

" Snakes, I hope they're insured! "

" They're insured for eight thousand pounds," the lady replied, handing back the signed chit.

The sallow young man's eyes had left the pearls for a moment as a quite young girl had passed, but in a moment they were back on the pearls again. He spoke in a seductive voice.

" That isn't the question. The question is, is the neck they're on insured? "

She pouted. "As if that was worth insuring, Guy!"

"That's all as a man happens to think. You do look topping to-night——"

The screen was drawn close again.

A lady in green paillettes, and another lady with a vast ostrich fan, could be heard talking as they crossed the floor.

"Huntin' this season?" came from the lady in paillettes in a nonchalant voice.

"I might if I happen to feel that way," the other answered as nonchalantly.

"Sir Thomas huntin'?"

"Oh, what with his public duties an' all I don't suppose he'll put himself about."

"Is it true I've heard——" There followed a few words in a whisper.

"I won't deny it's been on the tappy," the other replied.

"Fancy that! And what will you be called then?"

"I haven't quite thought what I shall choose."

"Play much at Deauville?"

"Oh, just a little chemang——"

They passed along the gallery and their voices died away. Two young men strolled after them.

"Oh, a chap who only knows the Army hasn't much of a chance with these shysters," one of them was saying.

"Wish I'd brains enough to be a shyster!"

"No you don't, Dickie."

"Don't I though! You don't know of a golf-club secretaryship going begging, do you?"

"I do not," the other replied. "Do you know anything about poultry-farming?"

"No, and I don't want to."

" Some of these head-waiters make pots of money——"

" Yes, but dash it all——"

A third young man came up and was greeted by them with an " Hallo, Cecil ! "

" Hallo, have either of you seen Garstin about ? Chacey wants him. There's a row about something."

" Haven't seen—I beg your pardon ! " The speaker had bumped into Nini, who came up. She spoke excitedly.

" Where is M'sieu' Garstin ? I want M'sieu' Garstin ! "

" I was just asking them."

Nini seemed distracted. " Oh, it drive one mad, thees club ! Do go and find M'sieu' Garstin ! "

There entered suddenly from the garden, through the revolving glass doors, Kenneth Chacey, with his most determined face on. He advanced straight to the group.

" Where's Garstin ? Anybody here seen Garstin ? "

But before anybody could answer him his quick eye had caught the closed screen. A light tinkle of breaking glass had been heard, and the screen had rocked a little. Kenneth strolled forward and plucked the screen aside.

" Do you mind ? " he said in a cold, controlled voice.

" What's the matter with you ? " the sallow young man demanded with a blustering stare.

" Nothing. Don't, that's all," Kenneth ordered curtly ; and, turning away again, he found himself face to face with Garstin, who had entered.

" Look here, what's this complaint of Lady Balland's ? " he asked of his friend.

Garstin's habitually weary voice seemed wearier still. " Has Lady Balland been complaining? "

" Yes, she has."

" Well, I've resigned from her service, that's all. Sorry, old chap, but it got just a bit more than I could stand up to. One has something besides one's wages to consider after all. Anybody can have the job."

Nini had started forward, tearfully, appealingly. " Oh, M'sieu' Garstin! Please! For me! "

Garstin shook the tired head. " Sorry, but I just can't. Let her say I didn't give satisfaction and left without a character. It won't make any difference to the club——"

" Of course it's bound to make a difference to the club——"

" She promised it shouldn't—it's purely personal——"

" Purely personal be hanged——"

" Well, I can only tell you what she promised. I'm simply no longer her bear-ward. And you won't see me here again. I'm off now. Sorry, old man. So long——"

" Damnation! " cursed Kenneth as his friend moved away.

Nini advanced and put her hand on his sleeve.

" Courage, mon ami—tout finira bien," she consoled him.

But " Damnation! " Kenneth muttered again.

He was waist-deep in worries of one sort and another, but Nini took more than half of them upon herself. " Courage, mon très-chèr," she murmured again, " they are coming in from the theatres now," and he took fresh heart. Things always brightened up when the stage-girls and their young men came in.

" It is all ready in the supper-room—you come with me and look," she said.

And as she had formerly shown him over her club, now she showed him over his own.

The large double room upstairs was set with tables for two, each with its softly-shaded light. Winifred Harrowby had done him well, it was a pretty sight, and Nini's touch showed everywhere. A noiseless service-lift brought up the food, for though he would have liked the kitchen at the top of the house, the difficulty and expense had been too great. At the faint aroma of cooking and of roasting coffee that came up the shaft he put his arms about her; those two odours, of coffee and the faintest touch of garlic, will be associated with his courtship to his dying day. He kissed her, releasing her quickly again as voices were heard outside in the passage. There was seen in the doorway, across the soft-shaded lights, a figure in light pink, simple and shapely as a bud by contrast with the richly-stripped and neckless women who sat in the alcoves with the young men below. She took a step back.

It was Una Paull.

" Oh! I beg your pardon! " she said. " I thought Maurice was here."

" Come in," said Kenneth quietly.

There was something in his tone she must obey. She advanced a little way into the room and stood with her fingers linked before her, the blue eyes transparent in the soft light—the new girl, always seen about with the same man but not engaged to him, perhaps ready on an impulse to walk into the nearest registry-office with him without engagement at all, perhaps equally ready to elope with somebody else altogether and to come back a wife : the girl who is a mystery to her parents and a mystery to herself.

" I don't know whether you know Miss Paull, Nini," Kenneth said. And, with a " Una, this is my wife," Una was presented to the woman of whose personal story Kenneth knew nothing whatever and now could never, never ask.

" Do you mind seeing how Ferrers is getting on? " Kenneth said to his wife.

" I go now."

Kenneth and Una were left facing one another in the empty supper-room.

He lifted his eyes. There was a hard look in them.

" We were married two months ago," he said. " I don't know yet whether——" There was no need to say the rest.

She was unable to speak.

" Can you guess what I'm going to say? " he demanded.

A faint " No " came from her.

Kenneth's voice gave a little jump, almost as if the girl before him had attacked Nini. " She's been a brick to me! " he said.

" Yes."

" You understand? She's been a brick——"

" Yes, yes——"

" See what I mean? " he demanded almost fiercely. " *You're* going to be good to her! *You're* going to be kinder to her than anybody else in the world! See? "

" Yes, yes, Kenneth——"

Then his voice dropped, and he looked profoundly at her.

" You see why? Because she loves me—you understand? She loves me—see? I'm everything in the world to that little woman—you understand? Because day and night I'm never out of her thoughts —see the idea? Because I shall always be that to

her, everything she ever dreamed of. She'd die for me. I'm part of her heart. I shall be that to her as long as I live." Again he gave her that long, profound look. " See the idea? "

She could not but see it. She could not but see that it was not of Nini, but of himself and her that he spoke. That love of which he told her, so cherished, so enduring, and so utterly without hope, was not Nini's love for him, but his own love for Una Paull. Otherwise than this he could not utter it. It could never be uttered again. Nini had had a rotten time of it. Everybody whom Kenneth introduced to her must see to it that that rotten time was over. And Una Paull must see to it more than all the rest of the world put together.

" See? " he said quietly at last.

" Yes," she said as quietly.

" Then that's that. That's all I had to say. Do you say you want Maurice? "

Together, without another word, they went off in search of Maurice.

Another dance was just beginning in the Boys' Room. It was the dance before supper. Many couples did not start it, but made haste to secure their tables upstairs; Kenneth and Una passed them on the way down. The theatre guests had poured in with their escorts; the revolving door still revolved from minute to minute. All was youth, gaiety, laughter. Half-way through the dance other couples broke away, hurrying along the gallery past Kenneth and Una. In the alcoves the gilt rout-chairs were turned up against the tables; those who supped there would fetch food for themselves. Not more than six or seven couples were left dancing; the rest had melted away. Kenneth found Maurice, and handed Una over. Maurice trowed well he knew of a sitting-

out place of which few others were aware; Maurice was familiar with the house. He bore Una off to the sitting-out place. The music stopped. The musicians passed through the revolving doors to the gardens. They would take their supper in the staff-room.

The floor of the Boys' Room was left an empty shining space, with Kenneth musing in the middle of it.

He had his heart's desire, and intended to pull through yet. Nothing was the matter with his club but its foundations, and these he would find means to underpin. Thanks to the sound-deadening and the not-too-noisy band, no complaint had yet come from the neighbourhood. Members had been very decent about making as little noise as possible with their cars, parked outside in the Square there. Garstin might be right—his own personal difference with Lady Balland might not involve her withdrawal of her support from the club. Blythe might succeed in patching it up with Lady Howmuch. Kenneth would see to it that that new member who had tried to get off with a rope of pearls behind a screen had his subscription returned and did not set foot in the place again. With Nini to help him, he had half a dozen new irons in the fire.

As he stood there, carefully weighing these details, the doors moved round again. They admitted a tall man in an old heavy travelling-ulster. He took off a tweed cap and showed his neat but thinning hair. It was Rex.

"Well, Kenneth——" he said, putting out his hand.

A sudden fear took Kenneth. "Anything the matter? Grannie?" broke from him.

"No, she's all right. I had to come to town

for a couple of days, that's all," Rex reassured him.

Kenneth drew a breath of relief. "How is the old lady?"

"Oh, quite contented. She sits and looks at the sea. She sends her love."

"Bon. And how are you?"

"Very fit. Everything here all right?"

"Oh, we have our little troubles, but we manage to pack them up somehow."

"I got your letter. That's partly why I came too. Is she here?"

"Upstairs somewhere. This is the supper-interval. Come along."

"Oh, I can't appear like this."

"Then let's go somewhere where it's quiet."

They passed along the gallery, meeting as they went the couples carrying plates of food and glasses of liquid. They were the couples who had secured the alcoves.

"May I have a look round?" Rex asked.

"Of course. I'll show you," said Kenneth.

"Would you mind my going alone, Ken?"

"Not a bit, as long as you keep out of the ladies' cloak-room. That's grannie's old room."

Supper was over. The dancing had begun again. The music was hardly to be heard at all in the rooms into which Rex, still ulstered and cap in hand, put his head. Only once it seemed to draw a little nearer. That was as he stood outside the door of his old bedroom, in a passage by an open window, out of which he looked. Below him the rosy-lighted awning marked the path across the garden to the side door. Beyond it the lights of the parked cars could be seen through the half-stripped plane-trees. The backs of the houses opposite were in darkness.

Behind him the door of his old bedroom stood half open. Lights burned within, but no sound came. He turned and entered.

It was now the men's cloak-room—the room which, not to disturb his mother, he had intended should be his bridal-chamber, was now the men's cloak-room. The bed had gone, and only a couple of dressing-tables remained. Hooked racks had been fitted, and on these hung hats, coats, silk mufflers, and a few gaudy dominoes, the property of the club. The bath had been removed from the adjoining room, and there had been fitted a row of basins and a long horizontal mirror, with brushes and combs and ashtrays on the shelf below it. Rex put in his head, and then withdrew it again. He stood in the men's cloak-room, with his head bowed. He stood for a long time.

Downstairs they had got out the coloured balloons. All was dancing, merriment, brightness, with the subdued thud of the illuminated drum, the ukulele, and the pipe of the Swanee-whistle. A man or two drank whisky-and-soda in Ferrers' American Bar. Maurice and Una were still no doubt in that secret sitting-out place, sparring and twittering. And Kenneth and Nini moved through it all, with eyes for everything, resolved to make the club a success or to join the other bobbing heads in the flood.

Rex had kissed his niece-in-law's hand, and she had looked at him with an outbreak of sudden tears in her eyes. They had continued to stream down her cheeks even as she had laughed.

"You will dance with me?" she had said. "You have forgotten? You have slipped back? You have not practeesed?"

But Rex was not dancing as he stood there among the hats and coats. Upright as he stood, with bowed thinning head and his travelling-cap in his hands, he

was praying. He was praying as he had read the Lessons in the old Herefordshire church, half aloud, penetratingly, so that a pin could have been heard to drop. He was praying for himself, and for the strength he so sorely needed—

"*I know that my Redeemer liveth.*"

He was praying for those luckless ones, contemporaries with none but themselves, who were being pressed out from life and its joy between two generations—

"*Yea though I give my body to be burned*——"

He was praying for that younger generation still, in whose unknowing hearts lay all the hope to come—

"*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*"

And he was praying for Peace in Our Time.

THE END